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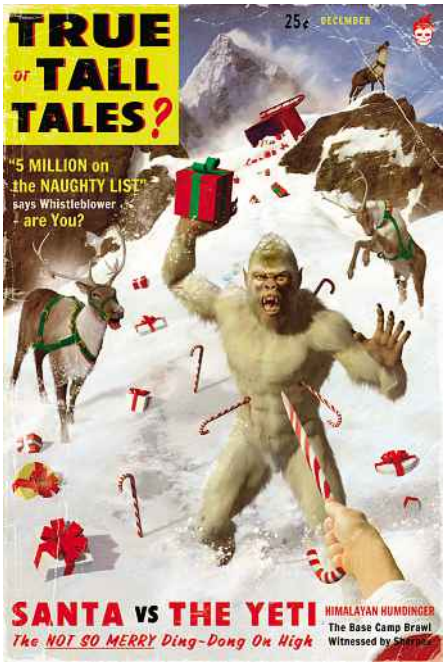
editorial

A very Yeti Christmas

Welcome to our Christmas issue of *FT*, where, for a few happy hours, you can escape the festive consumerist slog and enjoy convivial company, amusing anomalies and spooky stories as we gather round the fireplace of Fortean Towers, raise our glasses and wish one and all a Merry Christmas. Yes, even those determined party poopers Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss, and their un-merry band of men and women known as 'skeptics'. Our own David Barrett went to see their new film – as he explains on pp52-23 – and was struck not just by the lack of genuine scientific engagement these skeptics displayed but by their cold-hearted, Scrooge-like sneering at the supposedly less enlightened. Nevertheless, we wish them well as they tuck glumly into their turkey and figgy pudding, even as we sit down to a feast of forteana – including a look at the latest Internet-spawned scare that is the Invasion of the Black-Eyed Kids (pp26-32), the strange history of London's Cross Bones Graveyard (pp34-37) and the unlikely tale of how two Dutch hunters helped gnomes take over the world (pp40-43). All this and the Disneyland Tiger too!


TRUE or TALL TALES?
25¢ DECEMBER
"5 MILLION on the NAUGHTY LIST" says Whistleblower - are You?
SANTA vs THE YETI
The NOT SO MERRY Ding-Dong On High
HIMALAYAN HUMDINGER
The Base Camp Brawl Witnessed by Sherpas

ALEX TOMLINSON

FAIRY CENSUS UPDATE

In the wake of last issue's launch of the new fairy census, Dr Simon Young – who originated and is implementing this ambitious survey of contemporary fairy encounters and fairy beliefs – reports good progress so far.

In just under three weeks, he has received over 170 high quality accounts of sightings and over 250 fairy belief reports. Simon aims to amass 2,000 sighting reports by the end of 2015, so please take the time to do the survey – if you have a sighting to report – or to fill in the more general questionnaire on beliefs.

For further information, and to take part, go to: www.fairyist.com/survey/. If filling in an online survey is difficult for you, then printed versions can be requested by email from fairyinvestigationsociety@gmail.com or by post from Via Piana 54, Santa Brigida, Pontassieve 50065, Italy.

A NEW CRYPTO-JOURNAL

We have also received good news about another welcome initiative from our colleague Loren Coleman, a longtime contributor to these pages and director of the International Cryptozoology Museum in Bangor, Maine.

Next year, the Museum will be launching a new, peer-reviewed journal – following in the footsteps of the late, lamented journal of the *International Society of Cryptozoology* (*Cryptozoology*, 1982-1996) and hot on the heels of Karl Shuker's *Journal of Cryptozoology* (2012-present).

The *International Cryptozoology Museum Journal* "will encompass cryptozoology in general, but… will specifically focus on the work of museums in preserving the history and evidence of cryptozoology, including such topics as discovering new species in museums, cryptids in collections worldwide, the personal holdings of evidence, historical artefacts representing past expeditions, fine art cryptozoology works, popular cultural representations of notable artists, media's portrayal of cryptozoology, and indigenous people's traditional works. Individual details of a sample of the ICM's holdings will also occur, in our mission to share and educate, as space allows."

For more on the *Journal*, including information for those wishing to submit papers, go to www.cryptozoonews.com/icmj/. The first issue will hopefully appear around April 2015.

ALEX'S SEASONAL ART SALE

If you're admiring Alex Tomlinson's magical transformation of the cover of FT298 into this year's *FT* Christmas card, then you'll be happy to know that you can purchase cards, prints and other goodies from http://fineartengland.com/featured/santa-vs-the-yeti-alex-tomlinson.html and help feed *FT*'s very own Tiny Tim (www.alex-tomlinson.com) into the bargain.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

THE SHOW THAT STORMED INTO THE FINALS OF BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT NOW A WEST END SMASH!

"YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS! One day something WILL go wrong and you want to be able to say you were there when it did!"
Graham Norton

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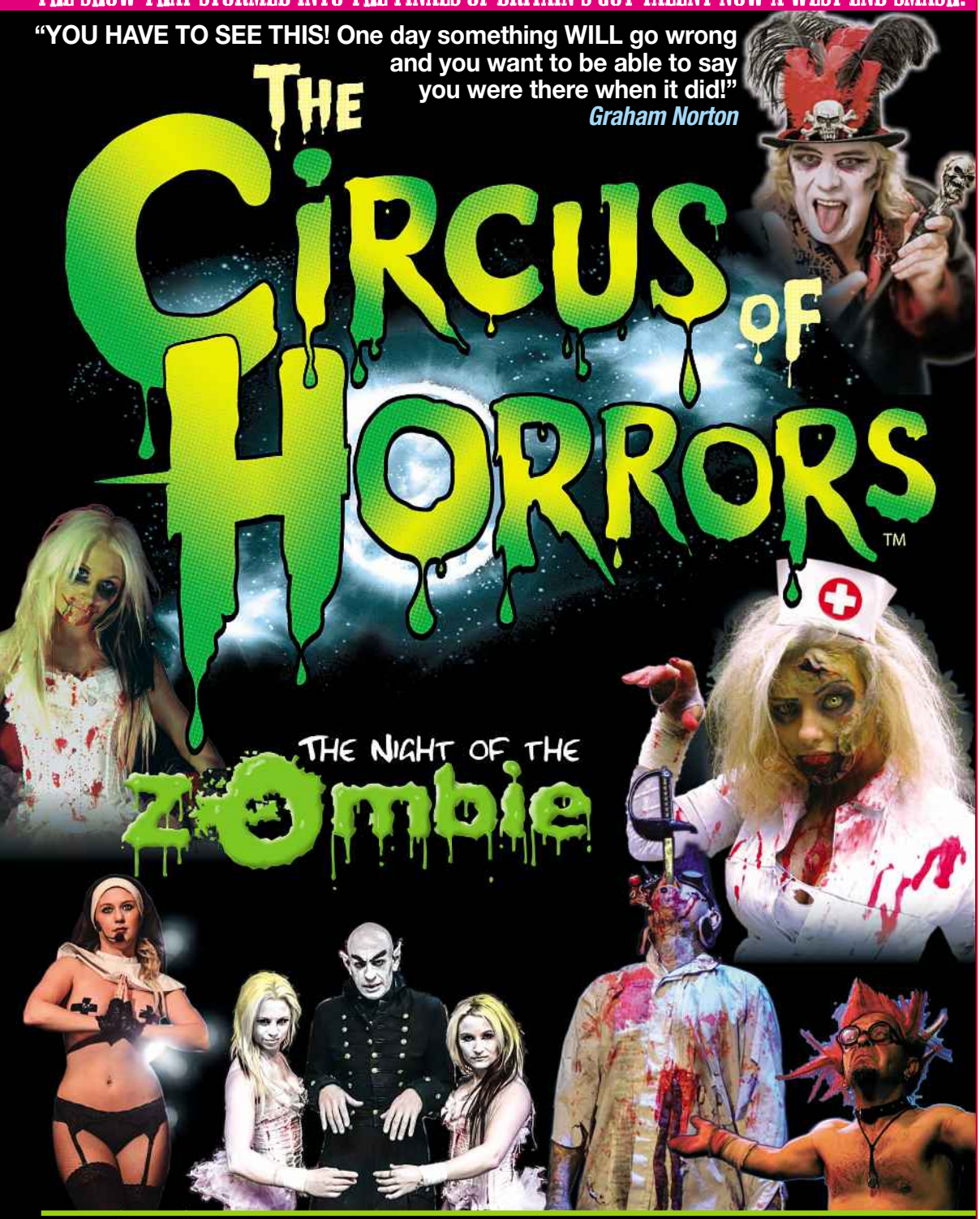

"BLOODY MARVELOUS!" ★★★★★
Edinburgh Evening News Festival Review

"FREAKY, FUNNY, SHOCKING & SEXY!" ★★★★★
Bizarre

"BLOODY GOOD FUN!" ★★★★★
Time Out

"Completely wowed the audience"
The Daily Mail

"A Bloody Good Night Out"
The Times

"FREAKING AWESOME"
The Sun

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strangedays

Hunting the Disneyland tiger

A major cat flap from across the Channel sees the gendarmerie in pursuit of a mystery feline

At 8.30am on 13 November, a woman photographed a big cat in the car park of a supermarket in Montévrain, six miles (10km) from Disneyland Paris. "She didn't get out of the car and called me to say 'I think I saw a lynx'," said her husband Jean-Baptiste Berdeaux, the manager of the supermarket. Several other residents reported seeing the animal; it crossed a major highway and slinked past a Total garage. One grainy photograph showed the animal on a grassy hilltop near some tennis courts. Experts from Le Parc des Félines, a big cat sanctuary in Lumigny-Nesles-Ormeaux, 20 miles (32km) away, arrived with sedatives in syringes. They said footprints – which they traced to nearby woodland – indicated a small tiger.

At the height of the hunt, a helicopter equipped with a thermal detector and more than 200 police officers and animal welfare experts on the ground were out looking for 'La bête de Paris'. Tracks were spotted the next morning near the A4 highway between the towns of Bussy-Saint-Georges and Ferrieres-en-Brie. The regional administration asked drivers to take "the greatest precautions" on the highway, a major artery between Paris and eastern France. Officers were stationed around local schools, and residents were warned against being outside in areas where the tiger might be roaming. *Le Parisien* newspaper splashed a picture of the animal on its front page with the headline: "The unbelievable tiger alert".

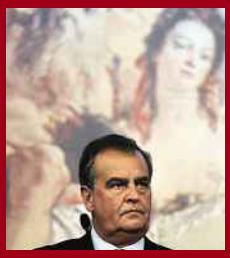
The area being searched, in the Seine-et-Marne district, was about 25 miles (40km) east of Paris. EuroDisney, which operates Disneyland Paris, said it kept no tigers. Animal experts dispensed advice on radio and television stations on how to react if faced with the marauding tiger. Shout as loudly as possible and don't run, was the general consensus, with one "tiger expert" – Gilbert Adelstein from the Pinder circus – saying it was best to scream in German if possible. "The guttural sounds could scare him away," he said. The mayor of Montévrain estimated that the animal weighed around 70kg (150lb), but Eric Hansen from the national hunting and wildlife office ONCFS said it was likely to be about half that weight and probably "not dangerous".

PHOTOS: AFP / GETTY IMAGES

It was best to scream in German if possible...

LEFT: The photos that sparked the panic. **ABOVE:** Members of the National Hunting and Wildlife Office patrolling the woods of Ferrieres-en-Brie.

The 36-hour search was dramatically scaled down the following afternoon after experts from the national hunting and wildlife office examined the footprints and suggested they might have been made by nothing more threatening than a European wildcat or even an oversize domestic cat. However, they said that the hunt would continue despite torrential rain, and forces remained "mobilised" in case of a fresh alert. *BBC News, 13 Nov; D.Telegraph, 14+15 Nov; Metro, D.Mirror, huffingtonpost.*



VOODOO VENGEANCE
Was a racist Italian minister targeted by a Congolese curse?
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WHAT LIES BENATH?
The search for Sweden's mystery submarines
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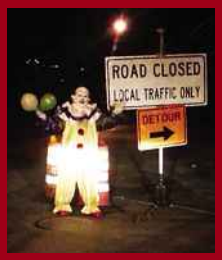


CLOWNING AROUND
Clowns, mostly creepy ones, continue to pop up all over
PAGE 16

The Conspirosphere

NOEL ROONEY ponders the recent strange appearance and disappearance of an extra block at the mysterious Georgia Guidestones; should we be worried?

The Georgia Guidestones (often called the American Stonehenge) have excited a whole range of reactions since they were erected in 1980 on behalf of a mysterious character going by the (obvious) pseudonym of RC Christian.

The Guidestones are, depending on your point of view, either a sentimental message of hope from a New Age Rosicrucian with more money than wit or a sinister whisper from the eugenic wing of the Illuminati.

The stones have a number of astronomical alignments built into them, lunar and solar, and a slot through which one can view the North Star. Another cunningly positioned slot allows the Sun to illuminate the date on a calendar inscribed on the central column of the monument. Should an apocalyptic catastrophe occur, humanity would be able to reconstruct the compass, calendar and clock from the stones; useful, that.

Built of local granite, by a local company – the Elberton Granite Finishing Company – the eldritch monument appeared to be complete, until September of this year, when a small granite cube was inserted into the stones, in a square notch which had apparently been carved out five years previously in an act of vandalism; anti-New World Order vandals have daubed slogans on the stones in the past, which have been cleaned off by the builders. The block was inscribed with the number 2014. It is not clear exactly who put the new stone in place, but a few days later, the stone was removed and destroyed, apparently by the builders. As it was taken down, additional markings (8, 16, MM and JAM; with 20 and 14, that's one inscription for every face of the cube, including those left invisible by its placement) could be made out on the small block (this much is confirmed by a video taken at the time).

So was the mysterious Mr Christian trying to tell us something? There are those who think that the insertion was a warning that it was all going to kick off this year; 'it' being the fabricated catastrophes designed to bring the world into line with the message of the stones. Since the message includes the idea that the world's population should be no more than 500 million, there was reason to be very afraid. Or excited. The New World Order's heroic enemies managed quite a bit of both as the miniscule granite drama unfolded, and the days between the appearance and disappearance of the new block were pretty busy in conspiracy world.

A local blogger, Van Smith, well known for his speculations on the stones, was tipped off about the new block a few days before it appeared. Smith, who told CNN "I am not a conspiracy lunatic, who spends all my time researching Freemasonry and things like that," (quite) was on hand to reveal the new stone and witness its removal. He wasn't the only one; a Democratic Party tactician called Bob Beckel forecast the addition in a radio broadcast in mid-September. It's probably cynical to suggest that the new stone had more to do with Mr Smith than Mr Christian, but it was taken down by the builders pretty promptly – apocalypse postponed?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_Guidestones
www.intellihub.com/12-inch-granite-cube-removed-georgia-guidestones-contained-numbers-2014-possible-date-oct-3/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ELDERLY MAN CAUGHT WITH €200,000 CASH TAPED TO HIS GENITALS

msn.com, —April 2014.

Free geological events

Hull Daily Mail, 9 April 2014.

Man not fined at court

Hull Daily Mail, 4 Mar 2014.

Man sentenced for talking dirty to drinks trolley on train

Canoe (Canada), —Jan 2014.

Atheist suspected in butter-knife attack on Jesus-looking wants godless lawyer

Orlando (FL) Sentinel, 9 April 2014.

Fire in wood burner

Hull Daily Mail, 26 Feb 2014.

Thieves swipe pensioner's life-savings disguised as a baked potato

Manchester Eve. News, 23 Mar 2014.

Report: Caterpillar avoided $2.4B in taxes

Arizona Daily Star, 1 April 2014.

LOST ASYLUMS

In these days of 'care in the community', it's difficult to imagine the industrial scale of provision for those labelled insane that came into being during the Victorian period. Particularly in the second half of the 19th century, 'county asylums' or 'pauper lunatic asylums' sprang up across all parts of Britain and continued to be built into the early 20th century. These once bustling institutions were often laid out on a grand scale. In 1914, there were 102 of them, accommodating over 100,000 patients; 100 years later, those that have not been demolished or turned into housing lie empty and derelict. Mark Davis has photographed and documented the history of 17 former asylums – the oldest being Staffordshire County Asylum, dating to 1818, and the most recent Barrow Gurney Mental Hospital which opened in 1935 – all of which are now in a state of considerable dilapidation and decay; a number, unsurprisingly, have their own ghost stories.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK DAVIS

Clockwise from top left:

West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum, Menston, 1888: a gated corridor that was used in the 2003 film *Asylum*.

West Park Mental Hospital, London, 1923: the gradual ingress of water into one of the former wards makes for some eerie reflections.

Cheshire County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, 1829: a gallery featurung single occupancy rooms.

East Sussex County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, Hellingly, 1903: the magnificent ballroom.

Asylum: Inside the Pauper Lunatic Asylums by Mark Davis is pubished by Amberley Publishing, ISBN 9781445636146, £15.99

SIDELINES...

EUROCROP GLYPHS

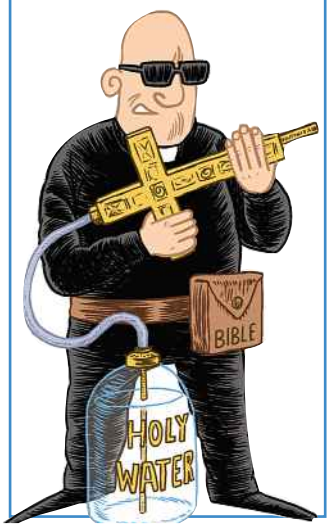
A design of squares and rectangles, 130ft (40m) in diameter, appeared in a sunflower field in the Krasnodar region of southern Russia on 17 July. Villagers claimed to have seen a UFO rise from the field, emitting a light beam. The region accounts for 40 per cent of all crop glyphs recorded in Russia. Meanwhile in Bavaria, a 246ft (75m) diameter crop glyph in Wilhelm attracted thousands of visitors who came to sing, dance and swing pendulums. *Moscow Times, 22 July; [AP] 31 July 2014.*

SERPENT SIMPLETON

A self-proclaimed animal lover released hundreds of venomous snakes into public parks in the southern Chinese city of Qingyuan to "give them back their freedom". Images on social media of Lang Ka Zhuo Ma freeing cobras and vipers provoked outrage, and the police were searching for her. *Metro, 15 Aug 2014.*

EXORCISM APPROVED

The Vatican's Congregation for Clergy has approved the statutes of the International Association of Exorcists and recognised it under canon law. Rev Francesco Bamonte, head of the Association (which has 250 priests in 30 countries), said Vatican approval was cause for joy. "Diabolical possessions are on the increase," he said. *[AP] L'Osservatore Romano, 3 July 2014.*



MARTIN ROSS

...but not as we know it

'Alien' skeleton up north and an unclassifiable sea creature

LURKING UNDER FLOORBOARDS

Kevin Rea, 55, a former record label boss who worked with Technotronic, called a plumber to fix a leaking tap at his house in Altcar, Lancashire, and was told he needed to dry out some floorboards. He said: "When I took one of them off there was a collection of cleaning products… and there was this weird nest and inside it was this thing." It reminded him of HR Geiger's monster in the 1979 film *Alien*. "I took some photos and threw it away," he said. Threw it away!? This suggests either that he knew it was man-made, or because it was a genuine corpse of some creature, either a mutant from Earth or something from deep space, and was too smelly to keep. We wonder how big it was. If anything more is revealed, we will pass it on – don't hold your breath. *Metro, 18 Sept 2014.*

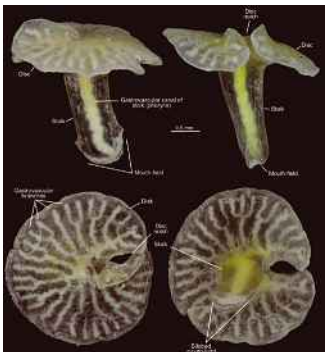
ABOVE: The thing under Mr Rea's floorboards.

MERCURY PRESS & MEDIA / CATERS NEWS AGENCY

NEW BRANCH OF LIFE?

A mushroom-shaped sea animal dredged from the seabed between mainland Australia and Tasmania in 1986 has defied classification in the tree of life. Only a few millimetres in diameter, it consists of a flattened disc and a stalk with a mouth on the end, and does not fit into any of the known subdivisions of the animal kingdom. The organisms – classified as two new species, *Dendrogramma enigmatica* and *Dendrogramma discoides* – are described in the academic journal *Plos One*. The authors of the article note several similarities with the bizarre and enigmatic soft-bodied life forms that lived in the Ediacaran period, between 635 and 540 million years ago, that have also proved difficult to categorise; some researchers have even suggested they were failed experiments in multi-cellular life.

The two types of Dendrogramma were recognised only recently, after sorting the bulk samples collected 28 years ago. "Finding something like this is extremely rare; it's maybe only happened about four times in the last 100 years," said co-author Jorgen Olesen from the University of Copenhagen. "We think it belongs in the animal kingdom somewhere; the question is where."



The system used to group every life form on Earth encompasses several taxonomic ranks. A domain is the highest rank and below that is a kingdom. Traditionally, biologists have recognised five or six kingdoms, including animals, plants, fungi and bacteria. Kingdoms are divided into phyla, which are grouped according to similarities in general body plan. The Dendrogramma don't belong with the bilateria, whose members share bilateral symmetry; they are multicellular but mostly non-symmetrical, with a dense layer of gelatinous material between the outer skin cell and inner stomach cell layers. The researchers did find some similarities to the Cnidaria – the phylum that comprises corals and jellyfish – and the Ctenophora, which includes the marine organisms known as comb jellies; but the new organisms did not fulfil all the criteria required for inclusion in either of those categories. They could either be a very early branch on the tree of life, or an intermediate between different animal phyla.

One way to resolve the question surrounding Dendrogramma's affinities would be to examine its DNA, but new specimens will need to be found. The original samples were first preserved in formaldehyde and later transferred to 80 per cent alcohol, a mode of treatment that prevents analysis of genetic material. Accordingly, the team's paper in *Plos One* calls for researchers around the world to keep an eye out for further specimens. *BBC News, 3 Sept; Independent, 4 Sept 2014*

Racist senator rattled

Was Italian minister the victim of a Congolese curse?

A senator who called Italy's first black minister an orang-utan has claimed that the woman's Congolese father put a curse on him that resulted in a spate of injuries, the death of his mother and an encounter with a snake. Roberto Calderoli, who was minster in charge of constitutional reform under Silvio Berlusconi, said the 'macumba' curse was cast by the father of the then integration minister, Cécile Kyenge, shortly after his offensive remarks about her at a public rally in June 2013. Since then, Mr Calderoli said, he has been operated on six times, broken two fingers and two vertebræ in an accident, and his mother has died.

Mr Calderoli, a senator for the right-wing Northern League who has called the northern Po Valley a "cauldron of fags", has also got into hot water with animal rights activists for killing a 6ft (1.8m) snake from a protected species that slithered into his house in Bergamo. "I found it in the kitchen with its head raised like a cobra in a film," Mr Calderoli told the magazine *Oggi*. He said that his Neapolitan friends had given him a coral horn to ward off the evil eye, but it had mysteriously cracked in half – proof, he said, that he had been cursed. "They consulted a fortune teller, who saw tremendous forces in action around me," the senator said, adding that he was looking for an exorcist and might turn to Pope Francis, "assuming he's not too busy getting immigrants settled into our homes."

OGGI

ABOVE: Clement Kikoko Kyenge at the ceremony in his home village during which a photograph of Mr Calderoli was placed on a termite mound. **BOTTOM LEFT**: Cécile Kyenge. **BOTTOM RIGHT**: Mr Calderoli posing with the snake that he killed.

Clement Kikoko Kyenge, 75, the alleged author of the curse, who has four wives and 38 children and lives in the Katanga region, said his family were Christians and had simply prayed for better behaviour from Mr Calderoli. He attended a ceremony in his home village at which a prayer was said asking God to free the senator from evil thoughts, during which a photograph of Mr Calderoli was placed on an enclosed termite mound. "If his apologies were sincere, he has nothing to worry about," Mr Kyenge said, "but if they were insincere the ancestors might become angry."

Ms Kyenge arrived in Italy in 1983 and is an Italian citizen. She is now an MEP, and said she would soon be seeing Mr Calderoli in court, where he faces prosecution for hate speech. "It seems the persecution is continuing," she said. "And in this whole situation the person being persecuted is me." If any more on this odd saga reaches Fortean Towers, we will let you know. *Gazzetta del Sud, 25 Sept 2013; Times, 28 Aug; kingnobleblackrulership.com, 31 Aug 2014.*

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

SIDELINES...

ONE TOUGH GRANNY

Kamala Negi (or Devi), 56, a rice farmer and grandmother, was walking home in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand on 24 August when a leopard pounced on her and grabbed her by the throat. She grabbed it by the ear and hacked at it with her sickle. After nearly a half hour of struggle, the big cat fled and was later found dead with broken teeth and deep cuts on all four legs. It measured 6ft 3in (1.9m) from nose to tail tip. Negi was hospitalised with broken bones and bites. *Wall Street Journal, Metro, 27 Aug 2014.*

NOTHING DOING

The second International Lazy Olympics organisers admitted that they should have promoted it, but couldn't be bothered. The event in Breznik, Montenegro, nevertheless attracted surprisingly good crowds, considering there was only one competition – lying under an oak tree. (How was the winner judged? we wonder). *MX News (Sydney), 5 Aug 2014.*

LONG TIME PRICKED

A needle found in a patient aged 60, who was being treated for chest and back pains in Jiujiang, China, was from acupuncture he had 40 years earlier, in 1974. *Sun, 4 Oct 2014.*

MY CHOW IS MIAOW

Vietnamese expatriate Tran Qui is thought to have grilled and eaten up to 30 of his neighbours' cats in Andernach, Germany. He said he missed the "tastes of home" and asked: "What's wrong with it?" He faces three years in jail. *Sun, D.Mirror, 20 Sept 2014.*

SIDELINES...

MASS AVIAN PROBE

In a ceremony to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, 10,000 doves were released at sunrise on 1 October. Reflecting government jitters over possible attacks, state-run media reported that each bird had its wings, legs and anus checked to ensure it was "not carrying [unspecified] suspicious material". The entire process was videotaped, and the birds were then loaded into sealed vehicles for the trip to Tiananmen Square, where they were released. *irishexaminer.com, 2 Oct 2014.*

ALL TOO MUCH

Mona Lisa fan Jean Margat, 90, has given his souvenir collection of 11,000 bags, brollies and ashtrays bearing the image of La Giaconda to the Louvre as he doesn't like the painting any more. *Sun, 5 Aug 2014.*

NUTSFERATU

Gary Doyle, 57, of Peckham, south London, was watching *Dracula Untold* in a local cinema when a squirrel leapt on him in the dark and screeched in his ear. He managed to grab it and throw it down the aisle before it sank its teeth into his throat. "I had a red mark on my neck," he said. "It was a vampire squirrel. It made me jump out of my skin." Besides Gary and his son, the only others watching the matinee screening were an elderly couple. *Sun, 13 Oct 2014.*

MONSTER MYTHS

ALL THE LATEST ON THE LOCH NESS MONSTER, PLUS STATE FUNDING FOR DANISH TROLL HUNT

RICHARD COLLIS

LEFT: A still from Richard Collis's iPhone footage. **BELOW:** Jonathan Bright's "gargoyle head' Nessie in the waves.

NESSIE ROUND-UP

While driving around the south-west shore of Loch Ness on 6 November, Richard Collis, 58, who has fished on the Loch over many years, noticed a strange object in the water about a mile from Fort Augustus, and managed to film it for two minutes on his iPhone. The footage shows a long thin shape swaying in the water about 500ft (150m) from shore. It resembles Nessie's fabled slender neck as seen in several 'classic' photographs. Mr Collis's wife Vibeke, 60, said: "I've been here 37 years and my husband has been here his whole life, so we are completely aware of how unique this is. I couldn't believe it and laughed when he showed me because I knew he could never set that up. He's not very technical." For a convenient list of Nessie sighting reports, see www.lochnesssightings.com , a website set up by Gary Campbell of the Official Loch Ness Monster Fan Club. *D.Mail, 11 Nov 2014.*

• Jonathan Bright, 46, a paranormal investigator and monster hunter based in Greece, has photographed what some interpret as Nessie's head emerging from waves on Loch Ness. He found the image among thousands of photographs he took at the Loch on an investigative trip to Scotland in 2011. "Some will say it's the monster," he said; "others will say it's a trick of the water; others will say it's a hoax. I hope to find more proof about what the Loch Ness Monster really is."

The Scottish Office opened a Nessie file in late 1933

Bright's photograph has been compared to the famous "gargoyle head" taken underwater at the Loch in 1972 by Dr Robert Rines. This isn't really very encouraging, as Operation Deepscan in October 1987 found a rotting tree stump on the Loch bed that bore an uncanny resemblance to it. Nicholas Witchell said that this was "undoubtedly" what Rines had photographed [**FT50:38-39**]. Jonathan Bright told the full story behind his photograph in "Meeting the Genius Lochii", **FT308:54-55**. *Scotsman, Sun, 8 Nov 2014.*

• Author Daniel Loxton says the first reported sighting of a "plesiosaur-like dinosaur" in Loch Ness was made by Londoner George Spicer in August 1933, when *King Kong* was playing to packed cinemas in the UK. Along with the giant rampaging gorilla, this featured a long-necked, humpbacked lake creature. "Previous witnesses had reported splashes or

JONATHAN BRIGHT

humps in the water," said Loxton, "but Spicer reported a close-up view of a long-necked creature that could have been lifted right off *King Kong*'s Skull Island. Indeed, I believe that is what happened. His yarn gave rise to many other sightings, making the 'plesiosaur' a favourite explanation for Nessie throughout the 20th century."

Marine biologist Adrian Shine, who has studied the Loch for more than 40 years, backed Loxton's theory, saying: "I believe that *King Kong* was the main influence behind the 'Jurassic Park' hypothesis at Loch Ness. Before Spicer's sighting, there were no long-necked reports at all." *Mail on Sunday, 17 Aug 2014.*

• Correspondence from the archives of the National History Museum (NHM) in London shows how the museum took the early reports of the Loch Ness monster seriously, and was keen to steal a march on Edinburgh's Royal Scottish Museum (RSM) and other museums in Scotland and around the world by exhibiting all – or part – of the beast's remains. This is revealed by David Clarke in his new book, *Britain's X-traordinary Files*. An unnamed NHM official responded to questions about the museum's policy on Nessie in March 1934: "Should you ever come within range of the 'Monster' I hope you will not be deterred by humanitarian considerations from shooting him on the spot and sending the carcase to us in cold storage, carriage forward," the letter stated, before adding: "Short of this, a flipper, a jaw or a tooth would be very welcome."

While researchers already knew about similar files at the RSM, David Clarke was astonished by the discovery of similar documents at the NHM. "Many influential people – including MPs and famous naturalists like Sir Peter Scott – believed in the existence of Nessie and a lot of pressure was placed on the Scottish Office to give it special protection," he said. "During the 1930s, the monster became an important symbol for Scottish Nationalists who wanted the police to protect the creature from big game hunters. Nessie had become a Scottish icon – a symbol of national identity. There was genuine outrage at the possibility that the corpse of the monster might be taken for display in London."

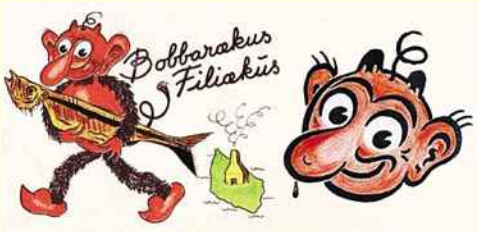
In a 1934 letter to Sir Godfrey Collins, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the RSM staked Edinburgh's claim to the carcase: "The museum urges strongly that the RSM have the reversionary rights to the 'Monster' if and when its corpse should become available. We think the Monster should not be allowed to find its last resting place in England. Such a fate would surely outrage Scottish nationalism which at the moment is thriving greatly under the Monster's beneficent influence."

The Scotland Office opened a Nessie file in December 1933 in Edinburgh after being bombarded with inquiries from the press. Pressure was already growing for a special Act of Parliament to prevent Nessie being killed or captured. The campaign was led by Inverness MP Murdoch MacDonald who assured Sir Godfrey the creature was no myth. "Evidence of its presence can be taken as undoubted," he wrote. "Far too many people have seen something abnormal to question its existence." He demanded a Bill be put before Parliament to protect the creature and asked Sir Godfrey what could be done to spare it from harm in the meantime. Sir Godfrey was advised there was "no law for the protection of Monsters" and "great fish, including those of no known denomination, may be claimed by the Crown".

In later decades, the NHM's appetite for all matters Nessie waned considerably. The archives show that in October 1959 it wrote to employees warning them the trustees "do not approve of the spending of official time or official leave on the so-called Loch Ness phenomena". However, another NHM file from 1962 shows that when approached by Tory MP David James, who was "obsessed" with Nessie, Prince Philip encouraged him to contact the Royal Navy for assistance. *D.Mail, Metro, 27 Oct; Scotsman, 28 Oct 2014.*

DANISH TROLLS

The state-run Danish Council for Independent Research (Det Frie Forskningsråd – DFF) is funding nine PhD projects, one of which will look into the trolls rumoured to inhabit the island of Bornholm. The cost of each PhD project is 2.5 million kroner (£274,000). Lars Christian Kofoed Rømer, the happy recipient of the Bornholm funding, said his thesis would look at the relationship between popular folklore and "actual relationships" with what he refers to as "under-earthlings" that are rumoured to live on Bornholm. Bornholm has embraced the popular myth of its troll inhabitants; the island's official tourism website tells the story of Krølle Bølle, "the national troll of Bornholm". The "small and cute" Krølle Bølle lives with his troll family on the 76m (250ft) high Langebjerg, coming out every night at midnight to have "many exciting adventures". Rømer has spent more than



two years studying descriptions of ghosts and the relation to death in Danish folklore. He said he finds it fascinating that the tale of Krølle Bølle, who was created by Ludvig Mahler in 1946, continues to thrive. He wants to explore the creature's "physical manifestations" on the island. "It can be creatures – most people are familiar with Krølle Bølle, a popularised version of natural beings – and it can be special natural locations that have unique vibes," he said. *The Local (Denmark), 28 Oct 2014.*

SIDELINES...

MONKEY BRIDGES

China is to spend £500,000 building two 800ft (244m) bridges for monkeys to cross a reservoir – no humans allowed. The colony of 500 rhesus monkeys live in a nature reserve on Taizhong mountain in Henan province, which will be separated later this year by a 12-mile (19km) reservoir. *D.Telegraph, 13 Aug 2014.*

CREEPY DOLLS

Mysterious porcelain dolls left outside eight California homes were each crafted to resemble a young girl living there. The dead-eyed figurines all targeted girls aged 10 or thereabouts in a San Clemente residential development in Orange County called Talega. Police were investigating. *MX News (Brisbane), 25 July 2014.*

SIMIAN PROPHET

A 24-year-old orang-utan named Eli, famous for accurately predicting the Super Bowl winner for seven consecutive years, has died in the Hogle Zoo, Salt Lake City, Utah, from breast cancer, first diagnosed in 2011. He made his Super Bowl pick each year by choosing between papier-mâché helmets or goal posts with team logos. *irishexaminer.com, 11 Sept 2014.*

TRAFFIC JAM

Motorists on the E45 near Sunne, west Sweden, faced lengthy delays in July after a lorry's doors came loose, spilling its load of preserved fruit. Firefighters had to hose away 100m (330ft) of "common pancake jam". *Metro, 24 July 2014.*

TWINS IN A HURRY

Twin brothers broke the same 30mph (48km/h) speed limit on the same road on the same morning. Retired military driving instructors Dave and Paul Dooley, 58, of Warrington, Cheshire, were nabbed at 35mph (56km/h). Both thought it was a 40mph (64km/h) zone. It was the second time in 15 years they were clocked within moments of each other. *Sun, 8 Aug 2014.*

Europe's unwelcome visitors

Unidentified Submarine Objects in Sweden and mystery drones over France

PHOTOS: PONTUS LUNDAHL / AFP /GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: A Swedish Navy fast-attack craft patrols in the Stockholm Archipelago, Sweden, in October. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Swedish Commander-in-Chief Sverker Göranson talks to media on the fifth day of the search for a suspected foreign submarine.

BALTIC SUB MYSTERY

According to news reports, many types of mystery submarines encroached on Swedish waters in the 1980s and early 1990s. There were mother ships carrying "baby subs" on their backs, and rumours of mini subs with wheels or caterpillar tracks emerging from the sea and crossing islands. Navy spokesmen claimed that there were screwless jet-propelled subs. The tabloids carried stories of USOs (unidentified submarine objects) becoming UFOs: they were "seen" emerging from the sea and flying away. Apart from a Soviet sub that ran aground near Karlskrona in 1981, no other craft was ever found. In 1994, the Swedish Defence Staff announced that some of the sounds previously interpreted as rotating screw blades were made by minks; and in 2000 military scientists ascribed many of the mystery underwater recordings to farts made by shoals of flatulent herring. However, the Swedish Navy maintained that submarine violations *did* occur in the 1980s. One of the remaining riddles was the wheel-ruts repeatedly found on the seabed where the mystery subs had been reported.

On 16 October 2014, the Swedish military reportedly intercepted a radio transmission in Russian on an emergency frequency, sparking a massive search for a Russian sub thought to be stricken in Swedish waters, the biggest Swedish mobilisation since the Cold War. Further encrypted radio traffic from a point in the Stockholm archipelago and in Kaliningrad, home to the Russian Baltic fleet's HQ, was intercepted the next day, serving to intensify the search, which involved stealth ships, minesweepers and helicopters, and hundreds of sailors, pilots and divers. On the island of Korso – one of 30,000 between Stockholm and Finland – a mysterious man dressed in black with a backpack was seen wading to shore, later "photographed wading back and forth off Sandön island". At a press conference, the Swedish navy showed a grainy photograph of an unidentified "foreign vessel" taken by a "credible source" – although it later turned out to be Swedish. Meanwhile a spokesman for the Russian defence ministry said: "There has been and there are no extraordinary, let alone emergency, situations involving Russian military vessels."

By 21 October the Swedes were losing patience. "Our aim now is to force whatever it is up to the surface – with armed force [depth charges] if necessary," said Gen Sverker Göranson, supreme military commander. The USO was spotted surfacing twice on 17 October and once on 19 October. One puzzle was resolved: the mysterious man in black wasn't a Russian frogman emerging from the depths, but a Stockholm pensioner called Ove doing a spot of trout fishing.

Then on 24 October Sweden cancelled its week-long search, costing £1.7 million, dubbed a "tragicomedy" by Russia's defence ministry. Russia denied it had a vessel in the area and asserted it was a Dutch submarine, a claim rejected by Holland. The public had reported 250 sightings, five of which the navy took seriously. "We believe that what has violated Swedish waters has left," said Rear Admiral Anders Grenstad. He said it couldn't have been a conventional submarine, but a "craft of a lesser type" – adding that it was not possible to state how big it was or to what country it belonged. On 14 November Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said there was "clear evidence" of a submarine incursion.

A conspiracy theory that the whole episode was manufactured to increase the naval budget was widely discussed on social media. "The timing is almost too good to be true," according to *Aftonbladet*, a popular tabloid. In fact, during the hunt for the submarine, the finance minister in the new minority government of Social Democrats and Greens pledged more money for the armed forces, even though the Green Party campaigned on defence cuts. What *actually* happened remains uncertain. *D.Telegraph, Times, 20+21+22+25 Oct, 15 Nov; Guardian, 25 Oct 2014.* For previous reports of Swedish mystery subs, see **FT82:32-33, 138:66.**

UNIDENTIFIED DRONES

French authorities have launched an investigation into unidentified drones seen between 5 October and 20 October over seven nuclear plants. "There's a judicial investigation under way, measures are being taken to know what these drones are and neutralise them," interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve told France Info radio, without specifying the measures. The tiny unmanned craft were spotted late in the evening, at night or very early in the morning. It is prohibited to fly less than 1,000m (3,300ft) above nuclear plants and within a 5km (3-mile) radius. France is the most nuclear-reliant country in the world, with 58 reactors on 19 sites, operated by the state-owned utility EDF.

The plants over which drones have been spotted are Creys-Malville and Bugey in the south-east, Blayais in the south-west, Cattenom and Chooz in the north-east, Gravelines in the north and Nogent-sur-Seine, the closest plant to Paris. Though Greenpeace forced their way into the Fesseneim plant on the German border in March 2014 and have a history of breaking into nuclear plants in France, Yannick Rousselet, head of Greenpeace's anti-nuclear campaign, denied any involvement in the drone activity. "What is happening is very worrying," he said, adding that France's nuclear research institute CEA near Paris had also been flown over, citing unspecified sources. *Guardian, 31 Oct 2014.*

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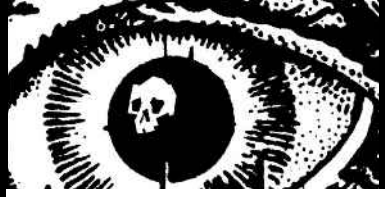

MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE on a recent rash of Black-Eyed Kids and spooks made in a Swiss laboratory

WHAT BLACK EYES YOU HAVE!

In 1979 a judge, Mr Justice Foster, famously said "only a moron in a hurry" could confuse the *Daily Star* with the *Morning Star*. Thirty-five years on, the *Daily Star* seems to be doing its best to attract just such a calibre of reader, albeit one who may be interested in paranormal phenomena rather than left-wing politics.

From a spate of ghost and life-after-death stories appearing in October, the *Daily Star* is wholeheartedly embracing the most dubious claims of paranormal pop-culture. In particular, the paper ran a series of hysterical stories of encounters with malevolent entities labelled in modern folklore as "Black-Eyed Kids" (BEKs) – initially, beginning with a tale about the return of one such phantom that supposedly haunted Cannock Case in the 1980s (see pp26-32). By 3 October, this had been expanded into claims of "a plague of black-eyed child ghosts" allegedly "spotted in Britain and across the world – sparking fears of a spook invasion." It relayed that "frightened *Daily Star* readers have called in to say they've also seen the creatures in Liverpool, Scotland and the South West, with anonymous "experts" stating that Black-Eyed kids are among the most terrifying figures to emerge from "the other side", and represent "the highest levels of pure evil".

For the *Daily Star* it seems the epitome of evil was reached when a "Black-Eyed Kid" was absurdly reported haunting Caroline Flack, a performer in the BBC 1 series *Strictly Come Dancing*. The evidence put forward was a photograph of a milky smudge hovering above her knee. Once again it is an after-the-event interpretation of an indistinct image, which in more rational and less sensational circumstances would be unhesitatingly dismissed for what it is – a photographic blur with mundane causation. Indeed, at the end of the article it was reported that: "A spokesman for the *Star* tried to play down the latest ghost sighting, saying the haunting image may have been caused by the reflection of a spot of dirt on a mirror." Nonetheless, the *Daily Star* ran this as an "Exclusive" ("Caroline Flack terror as black eyed child ghost appears in Strictly snap", 8 Oct 2014).

According to folklorist and author Scott Wood, the BEKs made their first appearance on the Internet in 1996, with alleged sightings in the USA. This corresponded with the time *The X-Files* was at the peak of its popularity, the dark eyes suggesting an overlap with grey aliens. (Lecture to the Ghost Club, 11 Oct 2014). For example, in 1998 the *Sun* gave uncritical coverage of a book called *Abducted – The True Story of Alien Abduction in Rural England*, involving both UFOs and poltergeist effects, and the alleged abduction of a Kent teenager named Jason Andrews. Written by investigative journalist Jean Ritchie and Jason's mother Ann Andrews, it received a deserved and contrary sceptical treatment at the hands of another tabloid ("Many Questions About Andrews Case Remain Unresolved", *Mail on Sunday*, 21 Mar 1998).

With the latest Black-Eyed Kids scare it was not another tabloid but the *Guardian* that challenged this furore. The *Guardian* has long enjoyed lampooning or playing down the paranormal, particularly around October time (e.g. "Ghost Hunter Haunted By Lack Of Success", 31 Oct 1990) while more recently in August 2014 it ran an article "Most Haunted: still the market leader in ectoplasmic claptrap", belatedly rubbishing a TV show that serious paranormal investigators gave up on years ago. For the *Guardian* the outbreak of BEK stories signalled nothing less than the *Daily Star* transforming itself into the scurrilous *Sunday Sport* newspaper ("Daily Star: Getting Into The Sunday Sport Spirit" 3 Oct 2014). It ought to be noted this stance of superior scepticism sometimes backfires; for example the *Guardian's* sister paper the *Observer* was itself conned in 2000 by Louis Mayerling who claimed he had staged hauntings at Borley Rectory in the 1930s supposedly detailed in his spurious book *We Faked the Ghosts of Borley Rectory* ("Hoaxer's Confession Lays The Ghosts Of Borley", *Observer*, 31 Dec 2000).

Also joining in was the *Irish Times* of 9 October 2014, which stated: "Black-eyed ghost children are the new grey aliens" and that as news "Real-world concern about the spread of the Ebola virus just didn't cut it". However, if the *Irish Times* was to do a bit of digging in Ireland's own folklore, it might realise that it could be wrong to attribute all such BEK and grey alien claims to tabloid sensationalism and modern folklore.

BLACK-EYE
CHILD
GHOST
HAUNTS
STRICTLY
BABE
EXCLUSIVE
STRICTLY Come Dancing is being spooked by a black-eyed child ghost. Sexy contestant Caroline Flack, right, was menaced by the evil spirit during a practice session, and even took a photo.
Full story: Page 7

LEFT: The *Daily Star* exposes the "epitome of evil" as Black-Eyed Kids terrorise a *Strictly Come Dancing* performer. **OPPOSITE:** A volunteer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology experiences a neurological ghost.

Take for example the following from *True Irish Ghost Stories* (1914) by St John D Seymour and Harry L Neligan: "[…] of all the ghosts in that well-haunted house [Leap Castle] the most unpleasant is that inexplicable thing that is usually called 'It'. The lady of the house described to the present writer her personal experience of this phantom. High up round one side of the hall runs a gallery which connects with some of the bedrooms.

"One evening she was in this gallery leaning on the balustrade, and looking down into the hall. Suddenly she felt two hands laid on her shoulders; she turned round sharply, and saw 'It' standing close beside her. 'It' was described as 'being human in shape, and about four feet high; the eyes were like two black holes in the face, and the whole figure seemed as if it were made of grey cotton-wool, while it was accompanied by a most appalling stench, such as would come from a decaying human body. The lady got a shock from which she did not recover for a long time.'"

If this story were recounted today it might be a prime candidate for inclusion as either an alien experience or an encounter with a BEK.

NEUROSCIENTIFIC PHANTOMS

Every few years a new batch of neuroscientists and psychologists declare 'Eureka!' and announce that ghosts, spooky sensations and mystical experiences are just on the verge of explanation as a result of new findings from tests conducted with physical aspects of the brain.

Previous suggested solutions to haunting experiences have arisen from studies of the different hemispheres of the brain involving the experiences of split brain patients,[1] neural tests with amputees suffering 'phantom limb' disorders,[2] and experiments stimulating the temporal lobes of subjects by magnetic fields and pulses.[3] Unfortunately, the makers of each successive announcement seem to have missed or forgotten the research and claims of their predecessors.

The latest claims for a solution to the problem of haunting experiences emerges in a paper entitled 'Neurological and Robot-Controlled Induction of an Apparition' in *Current Biology*.[4] This time it is lesions in three distinct brain regions: temporoparietal,

insular, and especially the frontoparietal cortex have been pinpointed by the researchers from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (EPFL), who measured the sensations of 48 blindfolded volunteers undergoing physical touching from a robotic device. Data collected by the team have led them to propose what they term the 'Feeling of Presence' (FOP) – often reported in haunted houses – is an illusory mental product, an own-body perception stemming from sensorimotor loss and confusion within the brain over its body image. FOP experiences are reported in patients with mental disorders who have brain lesions and also among healthy people in certain isolated situations such as mountain climbing, as well as in cross-cultural accounts of ghosts and hauntings. As distilled down by the non-specialist media, their findings have been presented as: "Scientists say that they have identified the parts of the brain that are responsible for generating spooky sensations," and that a neurological explanation for ghosts is imminent.[5] In fact, the actual reported findings prove a good deal more complex and subject to reservations.

Healthy volunteers were tested by the EPFL team using a robot system activated via a participant's index finger movements, causing the robot to administer touches to the person's back. The responses of volunteers were monitored, and the experiments were found to induce changes in bodily consciousness and awareness.

When the movements at the front and back of the volunteer's body took place at exactly the same time, volunteers reported feeling nothing strange; but when a 50-millisecond delay was created in the system to create a gap between activation and being touched, a number of volunteers gained the illusory impression that someone else was present in the laboratory with them. Basically, whenever the robot generated conflicting touching signals incompatible with physical self-touch, subjects gained the impression someone else was touching them. When asked the question "How many people do you feel close to you?" while being stimulated by the robot, a significantly higher number of people reported up to four people being present, although at no stage was anyone ever close to the participants. Two of the participants found the sensations so strange they asked for the experiments to stop.

Though admitting the processes are not yet understood, the EPFL authors concluded: "These data show that the illusion of feeling another person nearby is caused by misperceiving the source and identity of sensorimotor (tactile, proprioceptive, and motor) signals of one's own body".

Dr Guilio Rognini was quoted as saying: "Our brain possesses several representations of our body in space. Under normal conditions, it is able to assemble a unified self-perception of the self from these representations. But when the system malfunctions because of disease – or, in this case, a robot – this can sometimes create a second representation of one's own body, which is no longer perceived as 'me' but as someone else, a 'presence'."

EPFL

Stepping back from the methodology of this experiment, one might conclude that being poked in the back whilst blindfolded by something described as a robot might well be expected to generate some odd feelings in the average person – no doubt influenced by where precisely it touches you. Certainly, some of the volunteers in this latest experiment seem to have ended up feeling rather like Mrs Gradgind in Dickens's *Hard Times,* who when asked if she had a pain replied: "There is a pain somewhere in this room but I cannot be sure that I have got it".

So does this latest discovery shed light on certain ghostly experiences? The problem is that we still have no comprehensive understanding of how consciousness and perception operate, let alone anything beyond. This is despite the idea that the brain contains two separate personalities or selves as a consequence of its physical structure having been proposed as long ago as 1844.[6]

One wonders on this occasion if the Swiss neuroscientists have done anything other than put a new high-tech twist on already known techniques for generating anomalous mental states and perceptions, some recognised since antiquity. Outside the laboratory it has long been known that a strange sense of a presence can be achieved by environmental stimuli, hypnosis, drugs, sensory deprivation and isolation or, contrastingly, by an over-excited nervous system resulting from social pressures (e.g. being part of a crowd during religious ceremonies or pop concerts).[7]

Indeed, in using blindfolded volunteers, have researchers achieved little more than the effect produced by a popular Christmas parlour game, described by Eric Russell in *Ghosts* (1970)? In a suitably darkened room a person disguised as a 'ghost' passes round "remnants gathered up from the supper table or kitchen; chicken bones, jelly, cake fragments or the like" between participants. Each item is solemnly identified as part of the ghost's mortal anatomy, e.g. "my liver, my forearms, my brain, and so forth". Whilst much depends on the actor's skill, as Russell observes, such sessions seldom end without the nerve of some participants snapping and shouts for the lights to be put on. Upset by the feel of an unknown object thrust into the hand, the hapless person is left "looking ruefully at the piece of jelly, which seconds ago, was indubitably part of a human brain".[8]

SOURCES

1 Julian Jaynes: *The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976).

2 Sandra Blakeslee and VS Ramachandran: *Phantoms in the Brain* (1998).

3 Michael Persinger and Stanley A Koren: 'Predicting Characteristics of Haunt Phenomena from Geomagnetic Factors and Brain Sensitivity: Evidence from Field and Experimental Studies', in *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidiscplinary Perspectives* (2001) edited by James Houran and Rense Lange.

4 by Olaf Blanke, Polona Pozeg, Masayuki and et al: 'Neurological and Robot-Controlled Induction of an Apparition', *Current Biology*, 6 Nov 2014. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2014..049; http://www.cell.com/current-biology/abstract/S0960-9822%2814%2901212-3

5 Rebecca Morelle: 'Ghostly presence created in lab' (BBC Science) at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-29939672

6 See Dr AL Wigan: *The Duality of Mind* (1844). Later considered by other pioneers of 19th century anomalous psychology – Dr William James, FWH Myers and M Ribot – and others since.

7 William Sargent: *Battle for the Mind* (1957) and *The Mind Possessed* (1973).

8 Ray Bradbury conceived a particularly nasty ending to this party game in his story 'The October Game'.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Creepy clowns continue their reign of terror while new clues emerge to Earhart's fate

CLOWN CRAZE CONTINUES [FT321:4]

The village of Vendargues near Montpellier (pop: 6,000), southern France, issued a decree on 30 October warning that "individuals or groups of people aged 13 or more" were banned from dressing up as clowns on streets and in public spaces on Hallowe'en or All Saints Day following. After that, anyone wishing to dress up as a clown would require official authorisation. On Hallowe'en, the French police issued a statement entitled "Evil Clown Phenomenon" on their national website, reminding people that "carrying a weapon in public is a crime punishable by a prison sentence". One fancy dress shop in Arras, northern France, was asking minors for ID before selling any clown masks or outfits, while other advised parents to opt for zombie or vampire disguises.

According to one report, the first clown incident in France was not near Douai in the north (as stated in FT's last report) but in Périgueux in the south-west, where a teenager threatened passers-by with a fake gun in early October, later saying he wanted to copy a YouTube prank. One later incident took place in Maco, Burgundy, where two teenagers, intrigued by a giant jack-in-the-box on the pavement, were frightened when a clown jumped up from behind a hedge brandishing a sword.

Back in March 2014, police in Greater Manchester revealed that they had recorded 19 clown-related crimes in the city during 2013. The zany characters had carried out bogus charity collections, robberies, attempted abductions and vandalism. One stole a bike at knifepoint, another sprayed graffiti and a third followed schoolchildren.

Also in March, there were several reports of a mysterious clown lurking round Staten Island, New York, with a bunch of balloons, creeping out residents (pictured above). He was dressed like Pennywise, the clown from Stephen King's *It*. A locally based film company called Fuzz on the Lens Productions quickly came forward to claim that it was responsible for the clown's antics. King jokingly responded on Twitter, asking: "Do I get royalties?"

Meanwhile, research at Tel Aviv University concluded that hospitals should use clowns to distract children having injections, as they can make them less anxious (!). Having clowns on hand, the Israeli scientists insist, both significantly reduces the anxiety felt by children undergoing skin-prick tests and also makes the experience seem less painful. Amazing! *MX News (Sydney), 11 Mar; [AP] 24 Mar; D. News (NY), 25 MAr; Sun, 11 Mar; [AFP] 31 Oct; D.Telegraph, 1+8 Nov 2014.*

NEW CLUE TO AMELIA EARHART'S FATE [FT123:19; 289:38-43; 306:7]

During her attempt to become the first woman to fly round the world at the equator, Amelia Earhart took off from Papua New Guinea on 2 July 1937. Short of fuel, she planned to land on Howland Island, southwest of Hawaii, but her plane never made it. The last radio contact was near the Gilbert and Ellis Islands (now the Republic of Kiribati). Many believe that Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, got off course over the vast expanse of the Pacific, ran out of fuel, crashed in the ocean, and sank. Others have proposed that she was on a US spy mission and was captured by Japanese forces, possibly even surviving World War II. The hunt for Earhart's last whereabouts has consumed researchers, authors, filmmakers, and the public's imagination ever since.

Now, a 19x23in (48x58cm) scrap of aluminium fuselage, found in 1991 on Gardner Island (now renamed Nikumaroro), an uninhabited atoll in the republic of Kiribati, may provide an important clue – at least according to researchers with The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR), a private organisation that's been on the trail of Earhart for years. The essence of the group's report in October 2014 is that the piece of aluminium was a patch replacing a navigational window. A *Miami Herald* photo shows Earhart's twin-engine Lockheed Electra departing for San Juan, Puerto Rico, on 1 June 1937 with a shiny patch of metal installed where the window had been, during an eight-day stopover in Miami.

TIGHAR researchers went to Wichita Air Services in Newton, Kansas, and compared the dimensions and features of the Artefact 2-2-V-1, as the metal sheet found on Nikumaroro is called, with the structural components of a Lockheed Electra being restored to airworthy condition. The rivet pattern and other features on the Nikumaroro artefact matched the patch and lined up with the structural components of the Lockheed Electra.

"The Miami Patch was an expedient field repair," said Ric Gillespie, executive director of TIGHAR. "Its complex fingerprint of dimensions, proportions, materials and rivet patterns was as unique to Earhart's Electra as a fingerprint is to an individual. This is the first time an artefact found on Nikumaroro has been shown to have a direct link to Amelia Earhart."

Nikumaroro is 350 miles (560km) southeast of Howland Island, Earhart's intended destination. Gillespie believes that Earhart and Noonan lived for a time on the waterless atoll, relying on rain squalls for

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

drinking water, and catching and cooking small fish, seabirds, turtles, and clams before perishing. In 1940, Gerald Gallagher, a British colonial officer and pilot, found the partial skeleton of a castaway on a remote part of the island. A campfire, animal bones, a box that had once contained a sextant, remnants of a man's shoe and woman's shoe made him think he might have found Earhart – but, based on measurements, Dr DW Hoodless at the British HQ in Tarawa judged the skeleton to be male and American authorities were never notified. The bones were subsequently lost, but computerised re-evaluation of the bone measurements by forensic anthropologists in 1998 suggested the skeleton was probably that of a white female of northern European descent who stood about 5ft 7in (1.7m) – Earhart's height.

TIGHAR has found a site on the island that fits the description of where the castaway's remains were found in 1940. Archæological excavations in 2001, 2007 and 2010 have found and recovered physical evidence suggesting residence by an American woman of the 1930s including several artefacts of the same type as items known to have been carried by Earhart. TIGHAR research has shown that serial numbers reported to have been on the sextant box found in 1940 are consistent with the make and model of sextant used by Fred Noonan.

TIGHAR plans to return to Nikumaroro in June 2015 with a remote underwater research vehicle to search for more remains of the aircraft. Contractors hired by the group in 2012 captured sonar images off the west of the atoll that appear to match the size and shape of the lost Lockheed Electra. Meanwhile, the current focus is on that aluminium patch. "The many fractures, tears, dents and gouges found on this battered sheet of aluminium may be important clues to the fate and resting place of the Electra," says Gillespie. *Discovery.com, 28 Oct; Christian Science Monitor, 29 Oct; Times, 31 Oct 2014.*

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

FANGS ARE WHAT THEY USED TO BE

Musk deer (moschids), of which there are seven modern-day species, are distinguished from true deer (cervids) by their absence of antlers and the presence in males of long, sharp vampiresque upper canine tusks or 'fangs'. They are also famous (and much sought-after) for the highly valued musk that the adult males' musk gland produces. The rarest species is the Kashmir musk deer *Moschus cupreus*, which had not been conclusively sighted by scientists since 1948 – until 2008, that is. For as only now revealed publicly, via an article published in autumn 2014 in the conservation journal *Oryx*, a team of World Conservation Society, Leeds University, and local researchers seeking it in the remote forestlands of northeastern Afghanistan's Nuristan province during 2008 and 2009, recorded five sightings, all on sheltered rocky outcrops. Three of these were of a single adult male, the fourth was of an adult female with her youngster, and the fifth was of an adult female alone (possibly the same female seen previously). *www.nbcnews.com/science/weird-science/vampire-bambi-rare-fanged-deer-confirmed-afghanistan-after-60-years-n240446 3 Nov 2014; Oryx, http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FORX%2FS0030605314000611a.pdf&code=941c758ca5fa7e9108c095f29250a990*

PHOTOS OF YETI PRINTS SOLD

Among the most iconic photographs of potential cryptozoological relevance are those snapped in 1951 by British mountaineer Eric Shipton of supposed yeti footprints in the snows of Mount Everest at an altitude of 16,000-17,000ft (4,900-5,200m). One shows a single footprint with an ice pick laid alongside it for scale, another depicts a trail of prints. Four of these photographs were auctioned at Christies in London last September. Lot #1036, entitled 'Yeti Footprints in the Menlung Basin', attracted 11 bids, and exceeded its upper estimate of £5,000, selling for £5,500. The buyer was not identified. *Sunday Mirror, 31 Aug 2014; https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/out-of-the-ordinary/yeti-footprints-in-the-menlung-basin-1036/8405/ ; http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/eric-shiptons-photos-yeti-footprints-sell-over-5000-christies-auction-1464925 10 Sept 2014.*

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Mountaineering writer Audrey Salkeld, who called Shipton "an inveterate fabricator of tall tales", has suggested his "yeti footprints" were part of a running battle of wits with fellow mountaineer Bill Tilman, who claimed to have found mysterious tracks in the Himalayas in 1938. The single footprint is indeed a very odd shape ["Shipton sunk?" by Mike Dash **FT54:18-20**].

NEW FROG IN NEW YORK

The urbanised centre of a major world city as familiar and populous as New York is hardly a likely setting for the discovery of a new vertebrate species, but this has indeed happened. Six years ago Rutgers University biological researcher Dr Jeremy Feinberg was taking a walk around Manhattan. Suddenly, and despite being familiar with frog calls from this region, he heard one that he didn't recognise. He traced the call to a leopard frog, which mystified him even further, because whereas the known northern NYC leopard frog species, *Rana pipiens*, gives voice to a call resembling a throaty laugh or snore, this particular individual's call was a short, repetitive croak, very different in sound.

DNA analyses subsequently confirmed that this croaking leopard frog was a separate species from *R. pipiens* entirely new to science, thus requiring its own formal scientific name and description. It has now received these via a paper authored by Feinberg and a team of fellow researchers, published in the journal *Plos One*, in which it has been officially christened *Rana kauffeldi*. This frog's exposure as a new species was a triumph for the combination of very different but complementary scientific disciplines, as commented upon by Feinberg: "This story underscores the synergy that traditional field methods and modern molecular and bioacoustic techniques can have when used together; one is really lost without the other, but together are very powerful tools." *http://news.discovery.com/animals/new-frog-species-discovered-in-nyc-141029.htm 29 Oct 2014.*

THE LOST GOSPEL

DAVID V BARRETT ATTENDED THE LAUNCH OF THE LATEST BOOK ARGUING THAT JESUS AND MARY MAGDALEN GOT HITCHED, BUT IS UNCONVINCED

PHOTOS: JUSTIN TALLIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Simcha Jacobovici (l) and Dr Barrie Wilson (r) attend a press conference for the launch of their new book *The Lost Gospel*.

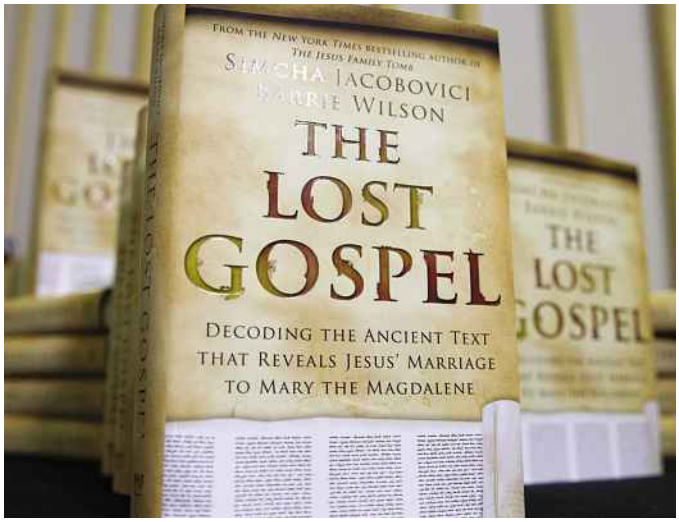
A press launch at the British Library (on 12 November 2014) with a host of TV cameras, gushing pre-publicity comparing it to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, [1] serialisation in the *Daily Mail*, a forthcoming Discovery Channel documentary [2] and comparisons with Dan Brown: it's official – Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and they had two children.

First correction: the launch wasn't actually put on by the British Library, and wasn't at the Library itself but in a small room hired for the occasion in the adjacent conference centre.

According to authors Simcha Jacobovici and Dr Barrie Wilson, a professor of Religious Studies at York University, Toronto, they came across a sixth century manuscript, forgotten and "gathering dust in the British Library". [3] Hence this prestigious venue for the launch of their book *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the ancient text that reveals Jesus' marriage to Mary the Magdalene.*

Nobody had really looked at the document before, they say. Ostensibly it's about the Old Testament patriarch Joseph and his wife Aseneth, but they quickly realised it's actually a hidden message: substitute Jesus and Mary Magdalene for Joseph and Aseneth, and you have a secret history, the story of Jesus's life.

Simcha Jacobovici is an Israeli-Canadian documentary maker, known for a number of controversial documentaries and books about some amazing discoveries: the ossuary of Jesus's brother James, the Jesus family tomb (reviewed in **FT224**), the actual nails used to crucify Jesus and, moving into a different area of what might be called crypto-archæology, the true location of Atlantis in marshland in a national park in south west Spain. [4] When asked, almost disingenuously, how it was that he had managed to make so many incredible, ground-breaking discoveries that have evaded scholars for so long, Jacobovici said: "The reason we find things is because we look."


FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE JESUS FAMILY TOMB
SIMCHA JACOBOVICI
BARRIE WILSON
THE LOST GOSPEL
DECODING THE ANCIENT TEXT THAT REVEALS JESUS' MARRIAGE TO MARY THE MAGDALENE

Scholars were quick to denounce Jacobovici's latest work. Dr Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church in the University of Oxford, called it "the deepest bilge". [5] Dr Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, said that "the entire premise is utter hogwash". [6] Dr Robert R Cargill, Assistant Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Iowa, said: "Mr Jacobovici's *The Lost Gospel* is neither 'lost' nor a 'gospel'." [7]

Rather than "gathering dust in the British Library" the story of Joseph and Aseneth is well known to scholars. There are over 20 known copies of it in different versions and several languages, and hundreds of articles and several books have been written on it. [8] And it has nothing whatever to do with Jesus and Mary Magdalene. It's actually an apologia for Joseph (of the colourful coat) marrying a non-Hebrew woman, the daughter of the Egyptian priest Potipherah. The story is told in Genesis 41:45, 50-52 with little further detail. They had two sons who became the fathers of the sub-tribes Manasseh and Ephraim (Joseph didn't have a tribe of his own). This was part of the Hebrew or Israelite family saga that makes up much of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. But many centuries later, when Judaism had developed out of the early Hebrew religion, it became forbidden for a Jew to marry a non-Jew. How, then, was the patriarch Joseph permitted to do so? The text of *Joseph and Aseneth* explains that Aseneth was so impressed by Joseph's

ABOVE: The authors pose with a reproduction of the 'lost gospel' manuscript.

piety that she converted to monotheism before marrying him – a small detail missed out in the Bible account – making everything all right.

Jacobovici takes this to mean that Jesus married a Gentile woman, so creating a new, non-Jewish religion – "and this explains why she was called the prostitute, because it depicts her as a priestess," he said at the press launch. (In fact the metaphor of "whoring after foreign gods" is found throughout the Old Testament.[9])

He also emphasised that, unlike "a handful of scholars" who had written about the Joseph and Aseneth document while ignoring its context, "we did not impose our understanding on it". Previous scholars all got it wrong, Dr Wilson added, "because they didn't bother to look at the culture out of which this text emerged; you've got to look at the cultural context to understand what the meaning of the text is, what it meant to its audience and to its writers and copyists".

The large number of scholars who have previously studied *Joseph and Aseneth* might disagree with this dismissal of their work.

NOTES

1 Book jacket inside flap; press release.

2 *Lost Gospel: Bride of God*, Discovery Science, December 14 & 21 2014.

3 Simcha Jacobovici & Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the ancient text that reveals Jesus' marriage to Mary the Magdalene*, New York: Pegasus 2014: ix.

4 www.simchajtv.com/finding-atlantis-movie-trailer/

5 http://cda.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Arts/article1481392.ece

6 www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-carey/jacobovici-the-lost-gospel_b_6133118.html

7 http://robertcargill.com/2014/11/10/review-of-the-lost-gospel-by-jacobovici-and-wilson/The Lost Gospel.doc

8 There is also a useful website at www.markgoodacre.org/aseneth/The Lost Gospel.doc, originally created in 1999.

9 EG Exodus 34:16, Deut 31:16, Judges 2:17 etc.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

183: ARE WE KEEPING YOU UP?

HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Whether tired, bored or nervous, we yawn in order to deliver extra oxygen to our brains and thus make us more alert.

The "truth"

Nobody knows why humans yawn. We know under what circumstances yawning occurs, but not what benefit, if any, it confers on the yawner. The idea that yawns draw in extra oxygen, and/or expel excess carbon dioxide, was popular for a long time, but was undermined by the discovery that human fœtuses can yawn from the age of 12 weeks while surrounded by amniotic fluid. Further studies then showed that people don't yawn more under circumstances when they might be expected to need extra oxygen – for instance, when engaging in physical exercise. Giving test subjects high levels of oxygen doesn't make them yawn less, nor does decreasing their carbon dioxide levels. And besides all that, there's no evidence to suggest that yawning actually does increase blood oxygen levels. For the moment, the idea that has replaced oxygenation as front-runner is that yawning might have thermoregulatory properties; by cooling the blood that's heading towards the brain, it helps to keep the brain at its most efficient operating temperature.

Sources

www.brainfacts.org/sensing-thinking-behaving/sleep/articles/2012/yawning; science.howstuffworks.com/life/inside-the-mind/human-brain/question5721.htm

Disclaimer

The Oxygen Hypothesis may still have its adherents. If that's you, do let us know via the letters page. If you can manage to stir yourself.

Mythchaser

An ex-Services reader of this column wants me to tell the world that it's a myth that suffering from the condition known as "flat feet" prevents a would-be recruit from joining the British Army, Royal Navy, or RAF. Can anyone fill in a few more details? Have flat feet ever, or anywhere, precluded a military career, or saved someone from conscription?

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK
OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

NECROLOG

This issue, we say goodbye to the well-connected English hippy who helped launch the Glastonbury Festival and ferry a pair of American celebrity psychics to the other side

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

ANDREW KERR

Andrew Kerr (above right) was the guiding spirit behind the Glastonbury Fayre of 1971 (above left), an event that subsequently morphed into the Glastonbury Festival. The son of a career naval officer, he went to Radley College where, undiagnosed with dyslexia, he was ridiculed as unintelligent. He had a number of odd jobs before becoming personal assistant, researcher and drinking companion to Randolph Churchill, who was writing the official multi-volume biography of his father Sir Winston. He became great friends with Randolph's daughter Arabella, though he found less in common with his son Winston, who dismissed him as "intolerably hip" (which gave Kerr the title for his 2011 autobiography). After Randolph's death in 1968, Kerr found his niche straddling bohemian hippiedom and high society. He dropped acid, hung out with the Grateful Dead, and investigated UFOs, while being a regular guest at luncheon parties hosted by Lady Diana Cooper. At one of these he explained to Princess Margaret at some length and volume that Jesus was a "hybrid" from a planet named Heaven. It was said she passed on this intriguing theory to the Archbishop of York. "I think she must have guessed I was a bit high," Kerr reflected.

Appalled by the rampant profiteering at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970, Kerr decided to organise a free festival at Stonehenge, but his plans fell through after Jimi Hendrix, who had agreed to top the bill, died of an overdose. Kerr moved to Pilton, near Glastonbury, to indulge his fascination with Arthurian and Druidic legends, and in 1971 he rented Worthy Farm from dairy farmer Michael Eavis, who had put on a small pop festival in 1970 in an unsuccessful attempt to repay his overdraft. Together with Arabella Churchill, 22, who invested £4,000 in a vast "psychic pyramid" stage, Kerr set aside an area on the site as a landing pad for flying saucers and doused for leys to determine the most auspicious location for the stage. He arranged the event around the Summer Solstice, thus aligning it to the pagan calendar. The pyramidal stage, one-tenth the size of the Great Pyramid of Cheops, was inspired by John Michell's "sacred geometry" and designed by Bill Harkin. "I had a dream about standing at the back of a stage and seeing two beams of light forming a pyramid and took that as a message," recalled Harkin. "Andrew gave me John Michell's number and we spent some hours discussing it…" [See **FT249:39-40**].

The Glastonbury Fayre manifesto promised "a fair in the mediæval tradition" and described the occasion as an "ecological experiment" designed to "tap the Universe" and stimulate "the Earth's nervous system". It spoke of spiritual awakening, Joseph of Arimathea and his nephew Jesus, and the zodiacal significance of the Vale of Avalon.

David Bowie, Hawkwind, Arthur Brown, Melanie and Traffic agreed to headline for nothing; free rice and lentils were paid for by Jean Shrimpton; news of the event spread by word of mouth – there was no advertising, no tickets, and no programme. Held over five days, the event attracted 12,000 (or 7,000) and was by most standards hopelessly chaotic. "There was a lot of LSD about," recalled Eavis, "and people were freaking out, wandering into the village wearing only a top hat." Still, the event was judged a rip-roaring success. Police recorded only two arrests.

After that, Kerr squatted with his Danish partner Jytte for six years on a remote Scottish croft where they had two children, Martha and Jonah. When Jytte left him, he drifted back south and worked variously as a drystone waller, assistant to Guru Maharaj Ji (Leader of the Divine Light Mission), Hollywood scriptwriter and chartered yacht skipper. In 1992 he put on the first (and only) Whole Earth Show in Dorset, promoting organic farming and sustainable technologies such as compost funerals. BBC Radio 4 carried the first wind-powered broadcast from the show.

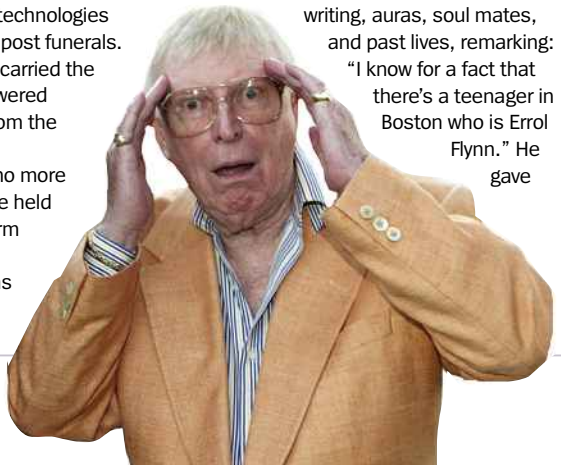
Although no more festivals were held at Worthy Farm until 1978, some pilgrims turned up every Summer Solstice, holding their own, impromptu gatherings. In the 1980s, Eavis took over the administration himself, and turned it into the world's most successful music festival. He wrote: "[Andrew Kerr] brought a new green conviction to Worthy Farm, raising environmental and ecological concerns to a national level of debate for the very first time. His charisma and charm dissolved any opposition to the Festival and the Glastonbury we know now owes so much to his vision."

Andrew Kerr, Glastonbury pioneer, born Ewell, Surrey 29 Nov 1933; died Yeovil, Somerset 6 Oct 2014, aged 80.

KENNY KINGSTON

Kingston billed himself as "the legendary psychic to the stars". He started reading tealeaves at the age of four, and Mae West – a friend of his mother – showed him how to pick up psychic vibrations from listening to voices. Opinions of him will differ, but it seems safe enough to describe him as the greatest psychic name-dropper America has ever seen. On this side of the Styx, he advised the likes of John Wayne, Lucille Ball and Greta Garbo; on the other side he took messages from Charlie Chaplain, Elvis and James Dean. He said he gave readings to Presidents Truman and Eisenhower about their re-election chances. The psychic knew Marilyn Monroe on both sides, providing her with readings and counsel after her marriage to Joe DiMaggio, then staying in touch after she died in 1962. She was studying philosophy in the afterlife in preparation for her rebirth in 2005.

Kingston (pictured below) was well versed in automatic writing, auras, soul mates, and past lives, remarking: "I know for a fact that there's a teenager in Boston who is Errol Flynn." He gave



MICHAEL BUCKNER / GETTY IMAGES

private readings at $250 an hour. He claimed to have performed many readings for Wallis, Duchess of Windsor. "She wanted the royal title," he said; "that's why, when Diana passed away, the Duchess greeted her on the other side." Princess Diana, who had a "pale green aura", told him that she had concluded that her death had been the result of a "well planned accident".

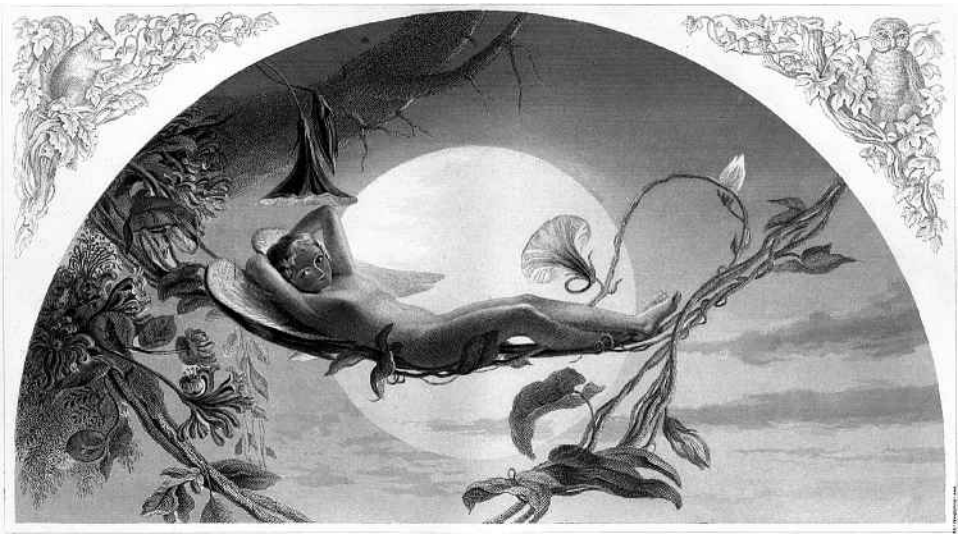
In Kingston's annual Oscar séances, luminaries such as Marlon Brando, Bette Davis, Clark Gable and Alfred Hitchcock contacted him to predict winners, but he had an indifferent success rate. "I'm not always right," he said. "That proves I'm no charlatan. They're never wrong. I'm just a happy medium!" Evidently, logic was not his forte.

Kenny Kingston, Tinseltown psychic, born Buffalo, New York 15 Feb 1927; died 30 June 2014, aged 87.

JOAN QUIGLEY

Quigley shot to fame in 1988 after being exposed as the astrologer who counselled Ronald and Nancy Reagan during their years as the First Family. According to *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* by former chief of staff Donald Regan, Quigley advised Mrs Reagan – who in turn advised her husband – on "virtually every major move and decision" from 1985 to 1987. Nancy, wrote Regan, set up private lines for their consultations, paying her "friend" a retainer of $3,000 a month. In her own memoirs, *My Turn*, Nancy insisted that Quigley's recommendations "had nothing to do with policy or politics", but the damage was done. Religious leaders condemned astrology as a "devil's tool", while prominent scientists expressed alarm at the idea that the President could act on the basis of such "evident fantasies". Quigley regarded astrology as a serious science. In her 1990 memoirs *What Does Joan Say?* she took the credit for timing "all press conferences, most speeches, the State of the Union addresses, the take-offs and landings of Air Force One". She also claimed to have derailed Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign in 1980 by picking an unlucky day for his final debate, and to have transformed Reagan's "Evil Empire" attitude towards the Soviet Union.

Joan Ceciel Quigley, astrologer, born Kansas City, Missouri 10 April 1927; died 21 Oct 2014, aged 87.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

PISKEY BATTLES

Castle-an-Dinas is a British hillfort, nestled in the interior of Cornwall, with ramparts, barrows, great views and immense… let's call it 'landmark charisma'. Now, as is well known, some Tudor mansions enjoy the attention of half a dozen spectral presences. This may sound impressive, but Castle-an-Dinas beats all comers as it hosts *three spectral armies*.

In about 1860, Henry Jenner learnt of an Arthurian band that was 'often' seen on the hill. His witness even claimed to have seen moonlight gleaming on their muskets – a disconcertingly un-Arthurian image. Sometime in the early 1900s, Enys Tregarthen wrote an account, instead, of 'piskey-battles' on the fort and the horror of an eye-witness who strayed into a piskey melee: the 'piskey' is the pixy of Cornwall and the story appears in a posthumous collection put together by Elizabeth Yates. (A similar story, for another Castle-an-Dinas, was picked up by that celebrated fantasist Elliot O'Donnell in his book *Ghostly Phenomena*).

Then, in 1932, we learn, in a local newspaper, of a Viking ghost warrior that used to march up and down by the fort: he was six foot five (2m), carried a spiked club in his left hand and did not answer challenges. (The kind of man who would measure a ghost with such exactitude and shout at said ghost makes me as curious about the witness as about the Dane). On the basis of this evidence, nights at Castle-an-Dinas must have been a blast, what with piskies, musket-carrying Arthurians and solitary Vikings tripping over each other.

> NIGHTS AT CASTLE-AN-DINAS MUST HAVE BEEN A BLAST, WHAT WITH PISKIES AND MUSKET-CARRYING ARTHURIANS

But can we trust this evidence? There has to be the suspicion that what we have here is not ghostly overcrowding but confusion. The 'Danes' raided and then invaded Britain and Ireland in the ninth and 10th centuries: but they are also remembered in folk tradition as a fairy people, something helped in this case by the place name: Castle-an-Dinas. And the best recent scholarship on Arthur suggests that, before a crown was welded to his head by Geoffrey of Monmouth, he was a magical fairy warrior living out in the wilds: even in later English and Continental tradition, he is surrounded by fairy figures.

Perhaps what we have are, instead, different terms for a fairy host associated with Castle-an-Dinas. Jenner says "Arthur", Tregarthen says "Piskey", a journalist says "Viking": I say tomahto, you say tomayto?

Also an appeal. There is a frequent claim that Samuel Drew (severe Cornish methodist, obit 1833) saw a ghostly battle at Dinas in 1793: I am convinced this is an Internet myth, but perhaps someone reading this knows better?

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

To contact **The UFO Files**, email: **nufon@btinternet.com**

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES INVITES US TO GATHER ROUND THE FIRE FOR A REAL-LIFE CHRISTMAS GHOST STORY

THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED MOOR

Elsie Ormerod* stared into the darkness of the bleak Pennine moors. No light penetrated the post-Christmas gloom, but something was out there. It had shaken her from sleep and disturbed her husband and both their young children, all now awake just after two am.

They had moved to this stone cottage in the middle of nowhere months before to enjoy the peace and quiet. When the kids grew older they would have the freedom to roam miles of rolling hills. Odd things went on around here, folks had warned them, and Elsie knew that this was true; but the eerie sound echoing across the moors was unlike anything ever heard before.

Whatever it was, it seemed somehow alive, pulsating in and out and creating a cold sensation. It was as if the atmosphere was being sucked away and then blown back out again; or like the tide coming in, she thought to herself. But the ocean was 50 miles (80km) away. Elsie breathed in the winter night air.

Her husband was repeatedly muttering that it must be a helicopter that was about to crash into their roof. But they both knew that the sound was no chopper. It was ethereal, not tangible. And they were miles from help.

Then the noise stopped.

Rushing to the window that faced the sloping moors, Elsie and her husband saw an oval of bright white light now sitting on the summit, several hundred yards beyond, silhouetting an electricity pylon newly erected but not yet operational. Then – just like the sound – this bright glow, that had just been casting dancing shadows onto their outer walls, vanished in an instant. The night returned to silence and near perfect blackness.

Though certain it was not a helicopter, they did check the next day. Elsie's brother worked for the power company erecting the pylon and confirmed no workers were up there. Equally, no sane helicopter pilot would cross these desolate moors – and certainly not at night – unless they had a very good reason, such as a search and rescue mission. But there had been none that night.

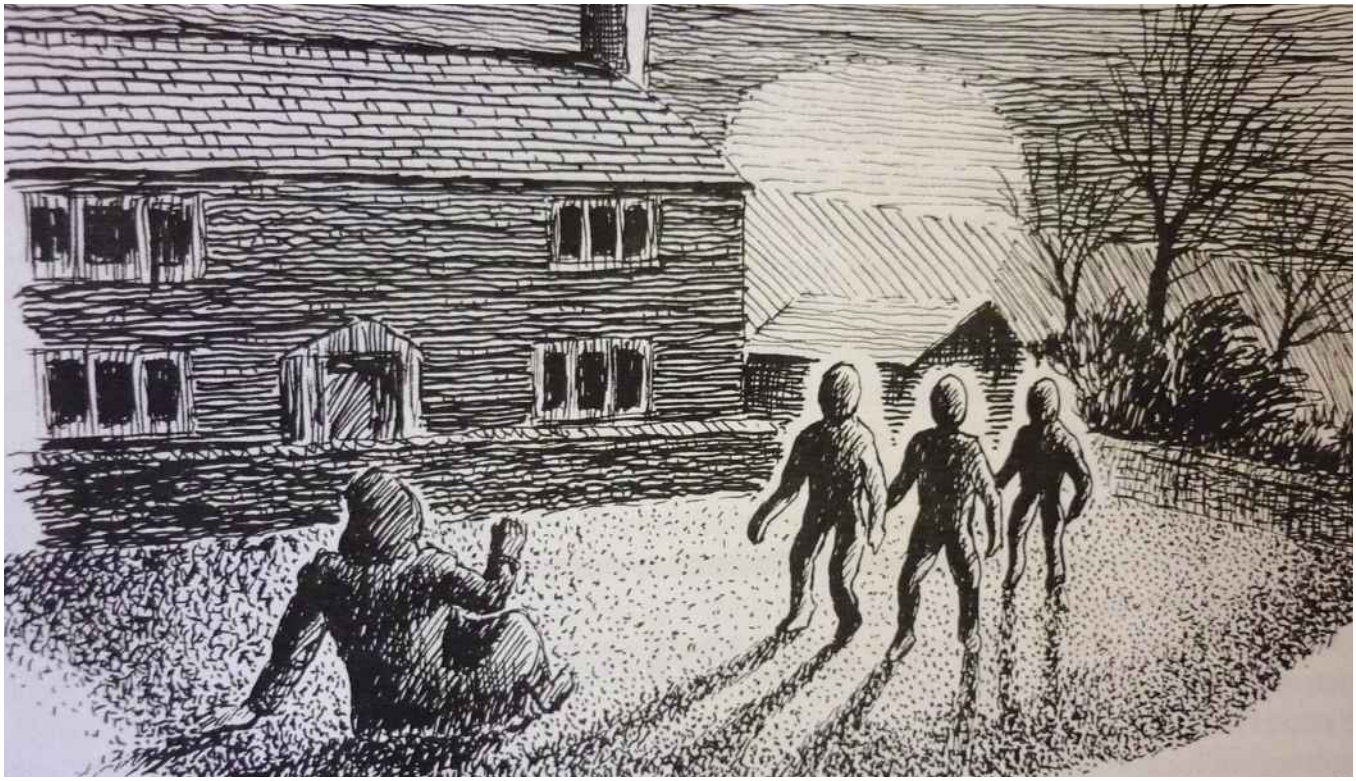
This scary episode was the first of many strange things to happen in the cottage, but not the first that Elsie had experienced. Over 20 years earlier, when just a small girl, she had suffered a terrible accident at home, tumbling headfirst over the stairwell. As doctors fought to repair her battered cranium, they told her parents to expect the worst. But Elsie came back from the brink of death that day… but not quite as the same young girl.

The new Elsie could see and hear things that others did not. She learned this walking over the hills one day when she stopped to greet a woman from the village. They said hello to each other and had a short conversation before going their separate ways. There was nothing at all odd about this until Elise told her mum, who looked aghast; the neighbour had died a few weeks earlier.

Elsie had talked with a ghost. It would not be the last time.

Now she was a young mother herself in that old house on the moors and life was full of these strange moments. Washing machines and sweepers would go haywire, sucking power from the circuits and blowing the fuses. As she touched the handles of domestic goods, her mind became swamped with images – figures from the past swirling in

ROY SANDBACH



ROY SANDBACH

her head revealing factory workers from years ago who had built the device that Elsie now clutched in her hands.

Another day, as she sat in the living room, her son arrived home from work on his motorcycle and she scurried to the door to greet him. But there was nobody in sight and Elsie realised that he had now grown up and moved out. Yet somehow she had just heard an action replay of what was once an everyday event. This house was like a giant tape recorder storing sights and sounds across time – perhaps even some from across space and time.

Some days, Elsie thought that the quartz encrusted walls of the cottage acted like a 'radio receiver'. Other days she just accepted that maybe she herself was now a 'satellite dish tuning into the past'. Whatever the truth, she knew that there were many ghosts surrounding her every day.

By the 1970s, this part of the Pennine moors had become notorious as a UFO hotspot. One not very famous but quite extraordinary event happened on 19 May 1979 in the Lancashire village of Stacksteads. Here, local tailor Mike Sacks and his brother Ray were on the moors looking for the UFO that Mike had already seen twice the previous winter. They were determined to get definitive proof and convince the world of its reality, so they had staked out the hills at night with a camera. At 2.27am during this stakeout, Ray yelled: "What the heck is that?" They both turned to hear a muted howling noise echoing across the moors, like a soft tornado raging through the dark. The noise came from a white glowing light falling towards them like "a lift out of control".

This glowing mass slowed down and the pitch of the howling decreased to a full stop. Now directly over the two stunned men, the object was hovering above a little stream just feet above. They saw a dome on top,

The house on the moors was like a giant tape recorder

which emitted electric blue sparks, a middle section and a rim with a translucent metallic glow. The thing tilted to reveal intricate detail below, then accelerated away and was lost over the horizon.

Mike stood on the moor, dumbfounded and staring at his brother. He later said: "There is not the slightest bit of doubt whatsoever. UFOs are real… It is just terrible knowing this and yet being unable to prove it."

So what of their proof? A dozen photos were taken that night as the UFO flew just a few feet overhead – pictures that should have changed the world. But they didn't. On processing the negatives, the pictures were found to contain only black sky. Not a trace of the object the men had witnessed.

Moving a few miles across the same moors, Elsie too was awake before three am. Through the window of her cottage she could see what had dragged her from slumber on this May night: a huge white light heading across the valley straight for the farmhouse. The ghostly oval had returned.

A fearful Elsie leapt out of bed, but then all went black as she lost consciousness. Her next memory was of sitting on the grass at the rear of the cottage. She was still in her nightie and holding one arm outstretched as three almost spectral figures glided over the slopes towards her. They were small, slight and coming at Elsie from the large white oval of light now landed on the ridge above her home.

Remarkably, Elsie concluded that these 'ghosts' were not phantoms or aliens but her grown up daughter with her young grandchildren paying a visit – a quite absurd idea, as this was the middle of the night. The figures did not visually resemble her family, but holding such a comforting image soothed Elsie's mind as the ghostly shapes inched towards her sitting alone and unprotected on the damp grass.

Moments later, she was waking up in her bed. It was dawn and the UFO had gone. Was it a dream? It had felt real; and several of her chickens now lay dead in their coop near the pylon beyond the back garden. There was no sign of a fox attack and they had been alive the night before. Elsie looked at her son, who suggested they sould call a vet.

Shaking her head she just said: "No, let's forget it. They must have got zapped by the power."

It was to be years before Elsie discovered what had happened to Mike and Ray Sacks a few miles across the moors. What did their story say about what happened to her that night? She stared at me as I related their encounter, and then she asked: "It was all a coincidence, wasn't it? It doesn't mean anything, does it?"

"Who knows?" was all that I could reply.

**Elsie Ormerod is a pseudonym and I omit any location of her farmhouse because she requested anonymity from Roy Sandbach and myself when we visited to investigate. We considered her to be sincere and found that she was a respected member of her local community. We have some thoughts about what might have happened during these experiences. Readers might like to submit their own suggestions. But for now, when you go to bed this Christmas, listen for the sounds carried on the wind over your rooftop and ask if it might not be Santa on his way to your door. Merry Christmas.*

54 AN AMAZON OF OUTER SPACE

THEO PAIJMANS on Elsa Sheridan's remote viewing of our Solar System

Mystery of Elsa Sheridan's "Dream" Travels to Other Worlds

Why Science Is So Interested and Puzzled by Her Astonishingly Vivid Descriptions of Journeys to the Stars and of the Weird, Wonderful Creatures She Found Living There

"The Venus dweller stands about two feet high, has only one eye and his flat, webbed feet are attached directly to his pudgy body. He spends the sweltering days shut up in an umbrella-like pouch, equipped with breathing gills which draw in and cool the hot air."

"The droll, fish-like inhabitants of Saturn live under an orderly government in their warm sea home."

"The 'Wooptars' of Mercury, have six legs, on which they travel with great velocity."

"Neptune's 'all-face' people live in great shells and feed on the fat of their own plump selves."

MISS ELSA SHERIDAN a pretty young New York woman, has been having an amazing experience and one that makes her an object of extraordinary interest to psychologists, astronomers and other scientists.

Night after night as she lay asleep she has traveled in spirit to Mars, Venus and many of the other worlds that dot the starlit spaces of the universe. Each morning she has awakened with her mind filled with such vivid impressions of the strange things she has seen and heard that it is hard for her to believe that these "dream travels" of hers are not realities.

The recovery of most dreams fades quickly and their details are often not at all sharply defined, but not so with Miss Sheridan's. Her recollection of her cosmic journeyings is deeply, unforgettably etched upon her mind. As a result she has been able to draw pictures of some of the extraordinary sights she has seen as she slept, and to write a circumstantial account of the conditions she found prevailing on planets millions of miles away from this earth of ours.

On this page today are published for the first time some of these pictures and extracts from Miss Sheridan's account of her dream journeys to other worlds. Can it be that by an astonishing freak of the subconscious mind this young woman, with no special scientific training and no claim to psychic power, is actually foreseeing facts that will some day be an accepted part of scientific knowledge? This is the question that will occur to everybody who reads how many things we thought "just couldn't be" have been proved realities.

"The first of my visits," writes Miss Sheridan, "was made to our warm little brother, Mercury. Contrary to scientific belief, Mercury is not a 'dead' planet. Indeed it is very much alive and very beautiful. In spite of the lack of water, the vegetation on Mercury is most profuse. The plants are all of an odd fan-shaped structure, with rows of tentacle-like cups resembling cut at the rim of the flare. These tentacles serve as a receiver to absorb the vapors and hydrogen in the atmosphere, and through a natural chemical process nourish themselves with the moisture thus acquired.

"They are many and varied in size, shape and coloring, ranging from five inches to as many feet, from a perpendicular pistillo bud to the fully matured, spreading fan and variegating from very dark to a brilliant emerald green. At the lower end of the tentacles long clusters of small, vivid red, globular fruits, which appear to serve as food to the Mercurian people.

"The inhabitants of Mercury are as unlike any earth-dwelling organism that it is extremely difficult to find words which will accurately describe these extraordinary little people.

"They have a language and call themselves, as nearly as we can express the sound, 'Wooptar.' Their height, or, rather, their length, is approximately fourteen inches. They have six legs, on which they travel with great velocity; large, round eyes and short, sharp tails, which they use with remarkable skill as weapons in combat. Their skin is of a tough, leathery substance and changes color like the chameleon.

"The female lays her eggs in the folds of the fan-shaped plants when they are in bed, and the embryo 'Wooptar' grows and thrives with the plant. When the plant has matured the infant begins its active existence by promptly devouring all the ripe red fruit hanging over his 'cradle.' The average life of the 'Wooptar' is one earth year, but since their calculation of time is vastly different from ours it makes their lifetime equivalent to our own.

"The temperature of Venus is such that it could never support life as we recognize it on earth. Even for the Venus dwellers it is rather too hot to be comfortable. Therefore they hibernate in the sweltering daytime and emerge with the setting sun. Therefore also is Venus the world of umbrellas—squat, short-handled, boat-ribbed, wide umbrellas, growing by the thousands on hill and dale like so many half opened mushrooms, with large pouches on the under side and equipped with soft breathing gills which draw in and cool the hot air.

"These pouches are the daytime retreat of the Venusians. With the waning light the umbrellas gradually close, until in the black night they loom up their full four feet like so many sentinels on guard. The early dawn spreads them out again and the Venus dweller crawls back to his cozy bed.

"The Venus dweller is not a pretty fellow according to our standard of beauty. He fits compactly into his umbrella pouch, much as a clam fits into its shell. He has a flat, pointed, shovel-like snout and an enormous belly, one phosphorous eye (useful to serve in the dark) and two flat, webbed feet attached without legs directly to his pudgy body. Each adult is about two feet long.

"Here is bleak, barren and uninteresting looking. It is a planetary cosmarian whose physical era has long since passed, who is living in the mental and reasoning the spiritual stage of its existence.

"The Martian is a small-bodied, large-headed, hairless creature, with two long arms and two long legs. They have ten fingers on each hand, but only one toe on each foot. Their hearing is tuned to the keenest pitch and their sight is extremely sensitive, but their sense of smell and taste is almost nil. Their tweezy fingers serve to receive and transmit really sensations which are made intelligible by their keen sense of touch.

"Jupiter, which is in the molten stage, is inhabited by creatures twenty-five feet long, with heads the size of our own attached without a neck to their slippery bodies. They have four pairs of short legs, culminating in sharp claws; two round, glittering eyes, doubtless in the phase of developing, and small flabby mouths, which they run with great dexterity up and down the backs of their companions, searching for millions of ova which thrive here and which they eat with extreme relish. They live in cavernous tunnels, some of which are several hundred miles in length.

"Saturn is one vast, slumbering, pacific ocean and its organic life is therefore aquatic. The Saturnic 'people' are similar in structure to some of our own tropical fish, but of a decidedly higher mental state. They live under an orderly government in their warm sea home. They are green, very pale when young, growing darker with maturity. They have long, graceful tails, which serve the combined purpose of steering wheel and propeller. Their round 'pop' eyes seem able to pierce boundless distances. They have neither arms nor legs, but small hand-shaped appendages on either side of their slight, intelligent looking heads.

"Frank Uranian a veritable hothed of busy life. The plants that thrive on its fertile plains are of a substance somewhat like rubber, which, combined with great flexibility in the terrific gales to which Uranus is subject. They are of several varieties, the most common being a short, thick, stubby, prickly plant, which is cultivated with the most scientific care by the Uranian population. It is hollow in the center and filled with a heavy, honey-sweet nectar. The plant itself, after the rubber skin has been removed, is also edible. It grows from several inches to three or four feet in height.

"Another plant worthy of mention is the Great Ball tree. It has a long, slender stem, culminating in a cup-shaped canopied flower. It is similar in structure to our own familiar Jack-in-the Pulpit. The Uranian 'Jack' grows to the tremendous height of thirty-odd feet and is of the consistency of soft rubber, bending completely to the ground in a strong wind and resuming its equilibrium with extraordinary elasticity. The smaller of the crops are used as nurseries for the infant Uranians, while the large trees serve as refuges in severe storms.

"The inhabitants of Uranus are most remarkable. They are about six feet tall and half the weight of the average human. Their skin is the color and texture of elephant hide. They have enormous bald heads, with one eye in front and one in back; one ear, shaped like a miniature megaphone, directly under one eye, and an abnormally long, squirming nose under the other eye.

"They have four, three-like arms, one in front, one in back and one on either side. One arm terminates in a mouth and the other arms have three-fingered hands. Their bodies are large and round like a tree trunk. They breed all speed records by traveling on wheels that grow on the lower part of their bodies, as our legs grow on us.

"Neptune, is inhabited by creatures who are all face and who live in great shells hewnout down from the inner side of the ice crust that covers the planet. As Neptune has no vegetation and no other form of animal life, its inhabitants simply don't eat. They live off the fat of their own plump selves until they are consumed. As they are very plump this usually takes about 185 earth years.

"Beyond the sun is Herallh, the earth's double. It has a climate much like our own. Its people are very similar to us in physical appearance, but far superior to us mentally and morally. They have an ideal form of government and in every other respect have reached a state of culture and civilization far above our own. They have outgrown greed, hate, jealousy, capitalism and their ultimate result, war.

"Through clean living and right thinking they have expanded their lifetime to between 150 and 200 years. They have one form of government over their three continents and speak one language. All the arts play a major part in their existence. They are a veritable race of thoroughbreds and they go by the romantic name of 'Hero.'

"The 'Heros' average five feet, six inches in height and have a deep tan skin. Their hair is short, thick, straight and white. They believe that man's capital choice is the WILL of the Great Unknown and cannot be revoked.

"They are almost entirely vegetarian, eating only the meat of a species of quail and a small white domestic mammal which are raised in great numbers for this purpose. Elephants, giraffes, monkeys and the like, and all reptiles have become extinct. The few horses and cows that survive are treated with the reverence due any relic of the past.

"Their domestic system is ideal. At the age of twenty everybody is well equipped to face life. Each child is taught to find the genius in himself and deliver it to the World in the form of productivity."

Miss Elsa Sheridan, who took the amazing "dream" travels to other worlds, which she describes here so interestingly

"The curious inhabitants of Uranus break all speed records by traveling on wheels that grow on the lower part of their bodies"

This is Miss Sheridan's picture of the queer creatures she saw on her "dream" visit to Jupiter—sightless, eight-legged beings, who pass their lives roaming about a vast and gloomy labyrinth of underground tunnels

"The hairless creatures who live on Mars receive and transmit radio messages through their twenty extraordinarily sensitive fingers"

Breathing umbrellas of Venus with their one-eyed inhabitants; tiny Wooptars of Mercury; dwellers on Uranus breaking all speed records because of wheels that grow out of their bodies; faces of Neptune living off their own fat; and Martians with fingers acting as radio receivers – our Solar System is teeming with all kinds of bizarre life. And we know this because of the nightly excursions of a young woman who remotely dream-viewed the planets more than 90 years ago.

"Mrs Sheridan is quite versatile. She has done dramatic work even as a child, is a pianist, a singer, commercial illustrator, scenario writer and dancer," a newspaper commented in 1922. To this list of accomplishments of the then 20-year-old woman from Jamaica, New York, we can add that of space explorer and discoverer of life on other planets in our Solar System.

In 1922, Elsa Sheridan was one of the youngest members of the Queensboro Society for Allied Arts and Crafts,[1] and the frail blonde woman with blue-grey eyes impressed a reporter with her unusual energy and drive. "My ambition, said Miss Sheridan… is to do something big in the dramatic field."[2]

Perhaps her well-received three-act comedy-drama *Jean Madison*, wasn't quite what she had in mind when she professed to want to climb the ladder of fame, as that same year a full-page article appeared in a number of American newspapers with the headline "Mystery of Elsa Sheridan's Dream Travels to Other Worlds". The article promised to explain "why science is so interested and puzzled by her astonishingly vivid descriptions of journeys to the stars and of the weird, wonderful creatures she found living there."[3]

Not that Elsa had a spaceship at her disposal; no, her information came to her in her dreams, she said. Night after night as she lay asleep, the article states, Elsa Sheridan travelled in spirit to Mars, Venus "and many of the other worlds that dot the starlit spaces of the Universe". Each morning, having woken up, she found her mind filled with "such vivid impressions of the strange things she has seen and heard that it is hard for her to believe that these 'dream travels' of hers are not realities." And while memories of dreams fade quickly for most people, this was not the case for Elsa. "Her recollection of her cosmic journeyings is deeply, unforgettably etched upon her mind. As a result she has been able to draw pictures of some of the extraordinary sights she has seen as she slept, and to write a circumstantial account of the conditions she found prevailing on planets millions of miles away from this Earth of ours."

And what strange conditions they were. Her first visit was to the planet Mercury, which she found, contrary to scientific belief, not to be a dead planet. "Indeed it is very much alive and very beautiful. In spite of the lack of water, the vegetation on Mercury is most profuse. The plants are all of an odd fan-shaped structure, with rows of

tentaculous cups reaching out at the rim of the flare. These tentacles serve as a vacuum to absorb the oxygen and hydrogen in the atmosphere, and through a natural chemical process nourish themselves with the moisture thus acquired.

"They are many and varies in size, shape and colouring, ranging from five inches [13cm] to as many feet, from a perpendicular stemlike bud to the fully matured, spreading fan and vegetation from very dark to a brilliant emerald green. At the lower ends of the tentacles hang clusters of small, vivid red, globular fruits, which appear to serve as food to the Mercurian people."

Yes, there are people on Mercury, but they are not exactly human-looking: "The inhabitants of Mercury are so unlike any Earth-dwelling organism that it is extremely difficult to find words which will accurately describe these extraordinary little people.

"They have a language and call themselves, as nearly as we can express the name, 'Wooptar'. Their height, or rather, their length, is approximately 14in [36cm]. They have six legs, on which they travel with great velocity; large, round eyes and short, sharp tails, which they use with remarkable skill as weapons in combat. Their skin is of a tough, heat-resisting substance and changes colour like the chameleon. The female lays her eggs in the folds of the fan-shaped plants when they are in bud, and the embryo 'Wooptar' grows and thrives with the plant. When the plant has matured the infant begins its active existence by promptly devouring all the ripe red fruit hanging over his 'cradle'. The average life of the 'Wooptar' is one Earth year, but since their calculation of time is vastly different from ours it makes their lifetime equivalent to our own."

Elsa's next stop was Venus, where the temperatures were such that Earth-like life could not thrive there. Even the Venusians found it too hot, so "they hibernate in the sweltering daytime and emerge with the setting Sun." Venus was therefore a world of umbrellas – "squat, short-handled, long-ribbed, wide" – that grew by the thousand on the hills and dales, having large pouches on the underside and equipped with "soft

"He has a flat, pointed, shovel-like snout and an enormous belly, one phosphorous eye and two flat, webbed feet attached without legs to his body"

breathing gills which draw in and cool the air." During the blistering daytime, into these pouches the Venusians went. When night began to fall and the umbrellas slowly closed, the Venusians emerged, on their four feet. Venusians, Sheridan regretfully informs us, are not very pleasing to the eye. "He fits compactly into his umbrella pouch, much as a clam fits into his shell. He has a flat, pointed, shovel-like snout and an enormous belly, one phosphorous eye (made to serve in the dark) and two flat, webbed feet attached without legs directly to his pudgy body. Each adult is about two feet long [60cm]."

Mars was an old planet, a "planetary centenarian whose physical era has long since passed, who is living in the mental and reaching the spiritual stage of its existence." There were Martians, obviously, but not the fierce warriors of, for example, Edgar Rice Burroughs's Martian novels. The Martians as Elsa saw them were no less weird, though: "The Martian is a small-bodied, large headed, hairless creature, with two long arms and two long legs. They have 10 fingers on each hand, but only one toe on each foot. Their hearing is tuned to the keenest pitch and their sight is extremely sensitive, but their sense of smell and taste is almost nil. Their 20 fingers serve to receive and transmit radio messages which are made intelligible by their keen sense of touch."

On Jupiter, which she found in a "molten state", 25ft [8m] long creatures slithered around, "with heads the size of our own attached without a neck to their slippery bodies". And throwing in some HP Lovecraft, she further described these creatures as having four pairs of short, clawed legs, rudimentary eyes and small, fishlike mouths, which they run time and again on the backs of their companions, "searching for millions of lice" – which form the basis of their diet. They live in underground tunnels, some stretching out for hundreds of miles. Saturn is one vast, slumbering oceanic planet in which the "Swimps" dwell, "similar in structure to some of our own tropical fish, but of a distinctly higher mental state. Their eyes can see for miles and small, hand-shaped appendages are found on either side of their heads."

Uranus was a "veritable hotbed of busy life". Rubber-like plants thrive on the plains, bending in the terrific gales that rage on the planet and serving as food. Uranian trees grow to upwards of 30ft [9m], serving both as nurseries and refuges for the Uranians, sheltering from the storms. The Uranians are remarkable creatures. Some six feet [1.8m] tall with grey, elephant-like skin, they have enormous bald heads with one eye in the front and the other at the back, one ear, shaped like a megaphone, directly under one eye and an abnormally long, squirming nose under the other. They sport four octopus-like arms, one in the front, one in the back, one on either side of their round trunk-like bodies. They travel around "breaking all speed records", on wheels that grow under their bodies.

Neptune is inhabited by life forms that are "all face and who live in great shells hanging down from the ice crust that covers the planet". Since there is no other life to be found there, the Neptunians simply don't eat. They "live off the fat of their own plumpy selves until they are consumed. As they are very plump this usually takes about 165 Earth years."

The Solar System of Elsa Sheridan features another surprise: the planet of Herolit, that floats beyond the Sun and is Earth's double. Since the planet has the same climate as that of the Earth, the life forms there resemble humans in all physical aspects. They are, of course, far superior to us morally and mentally. Herolit is Utopia, with an ideal form of government, state of culture and civilisation. Its inhabitants have outgrown greed, lust, hate, capitalism and war and live to be 150-200 years old. One government rules over the three continents on the planet, and its inhabitants – "a veritable race of thoroughbreds" – are called 'Hero'. They average 5ft 6in [168cm] in height, with deep tan skin and short, thick, straight and white hair. "They believe that one's nuptial choice is the Will of the Great Unknown and cannot be revoked. They are almost entirely vegetarian, eating only the meat of a bird and a small animal raised for that purpose in great numbers. All other animals have become extinct, and the few horses and cows that have survived are treated with great reverence."

So what are we to make of Elsa's dream journeys? I found that the copyright to this story was entered on 7 May 1922 in her name.[4] I wanted to see whether her descriptions and drawings led perhaps to a book, but only found another title of hers, published in 1932 under the pseudonym Daria Grey entitled *God Loves a Dumbbell*.[5] It is classified as "American wit and humour", and this may be our best clue. Since she seems to have disappeared after that from the pages of history and I found no mention of her dream travels as the basis for a published science fiction book,[6] it may very well have been that sparkly, artistic Elsa Sheridan one day woke up and decided, in good fun, to simply pull our legs.

NOTES

1 'To Stage Girl's Play', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 Feb 1917.

2 '20-Year-Old Jamaica Girl Woos Fame as Playwright', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 17 Feb 1917.

3 I found her 'Mystery of Elsa Sheridan's Dream Travels to Other Worlds' published in *Buffalo Morning Express*, 7 May 1922; *Syracuse Herald*, 7 May, 1922; *Seattle Daily Times*, 14 May 1922; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 May 1922, and, four years later, in *Sandusky Star Journal*, 3 Dec 1926. It was also published in the *Pittsburg Sunday Post* in 1922.

4 *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Part 1, Books, Group 2, New Series, Volume 19, For The Year 1922*, Washington Printing Office, 1923, p1055.

5 Published by Pegasus Publishing Company of New York.

6 In for instance Everett F Bleiler, *Science Fiction, The Early Years*, Kent State University Press, 1990, and his *Science Fiction: The Gernsback Years*, Kent State University Press, 1998.

Invasion of the Black-Eyed Kids

In the autumn of 2014, British tabloid newspapers became fixated on a brand new supernatural threat: Black-Eyed Children. **STUART FERROL** asks what's behind this sudden eruption of screaming ghost kids and delves into the origins of an Internet-age scare...

"Can we come inside? We need to use your telephone".

It sounds like a reasonable and polite request, and coming from such small and forlorn-looking children, how could you resist? But just as you open the door to these interlopers – even before you can wonder what sort of kids nowadays don't have mobile phones – you notice something about them that you didn't spot at first: their eyes are totally black.

This is how a typical Black Eyed Kid – or BEK – story begins. It's the kind of tale that has been gaining an increasingly hysterical level of popularity in North America since the late 1990s. It's the kind of tale told around the virtual campfire of the Internet and paranormal radio shows and podcasts; and it has recently reached the shores of the UK, with the tabloid newspaper *Daily Star* picking up the story of a screaming BEK at Cannock Chase, Staffordshire.

"Just two little kids"

But the first reported sighting came from American journalist Brian Bethel in his hometown of Abilene, Texas, in 1996. Bethel had parked in front of a cinema when there was a knock on his driver's side window. Two boys aged between nine and 12 years old and wearing hooded tops were standing outside. Cranking the window open, Bethel saw that the closest of the two was curly-haired and olive-skinned, while the other – who stayed in the background – was redheaded, pale and freckled. Perfectly normal looking children – so why was Bethel suddenly wracked with incomprehensible terror?

The boy with the dark complexion asked innocently enough if they might get a lift back to his mother's house, as he and his friend wanted to see the movie *Mortal Kombat* but had left their money at home. Checking the showtimes on the marquee in front of him Bethel realised the movie had already started, so a lift anywhere would be pointless. Despite continuous and almost hypnotic reassurances from the "spokesman" of the pair, the fear that had gripped the journalist increased; and when the boy added "It won't take long, we're just two little kids; we don't have a gun or anything," Bethel realised he had been unconsciously reaching to unlock the driver's side door. Snatching back his hand, he came to his senses and noticed something that he had previously been totally unaware of: both boys' eyes were completely black, without irises or pupils: "Soulless orbs like two great swathes of starless night." [1]

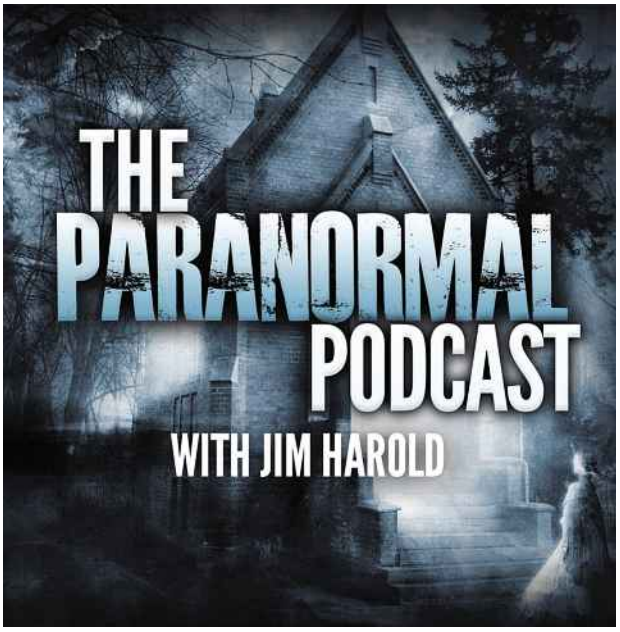
> Their eyes were "soulless orbs like two great swathes of starless night"

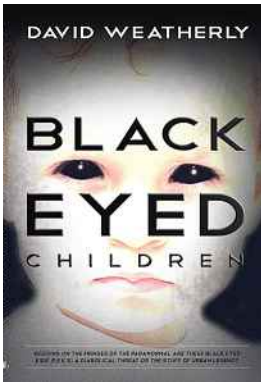
Sheer panic took over as he rolled up the window, pulled the gearshift into reverse and started to pull away. The "spokesman" hammered on the window, imploring furiously: "We can't come in unless you tell us it's OK. Let us in!" Bethel gunned his car out of the parking lot, oblivious to other traffic, and stole a quick peek into the rear view mirror. The boys had vanished.

Brian Bethel still lives in Abilene, is still a writer on the *Abilene Reporter*, and often drives past the parking lot, a chill running down his spine every time. Being a writer, he wrote.

At first he shared his story with a small group of friends on an email list. Before long, though – as things on the Internet are wont to do – the story spread. He began to be contacted by inquisitive web surfers, paranormal hobbyists, a Korean TV station and people who recognised a good story. Some of the people who contacted him, however, claimed to have had almost the exact same experience. Throughout the 2000s, the number of witnesses grew with the increasing popularity and notoriety of the phenomenon. The newly acquired, search engine-friendly name of Black Eyed Kids – and the acronym 'BEKs' – certainly helped. Writers like Jason Offutt [2] and David Weatherly [3] took an interest, and produced

MAIN IMAGE: ETIENNE GILFILLAN





FAR LEFT: An unknown artist's impression of Brian Bethel's 1996 encounter in Abilene, Texas. **LEFT:** One of the podcasts that brought the BEKs to prominence. **LEFT:** David Weatherly has written one of the first books concerning the BEK phenomenon.

articles and books on the subject. They soon found themselves guesting on paranormal radio shows and podcasts like *Coast To Coast AM*, Dave Schrader's *Darkness Radio* and Jim Harold's *Paranormal Podcast*. The craze had spread to another medium.

On the air

Jason Offutt had read one of the early posts about Bethel's sighting back in the late 1990s and was instantly fascinated. He went on to interview Bethel as well as other experiencers. Over the years, he noticed that their reports differ very little. Here is his breakdown of a typical BEK encounter:

Two (usually two, sometimes one, rarely more) children between the ages of seven and 17 approach a person in their home/vehicle/on a lonely street and request something. Sometimes to be let into the house for a glass of water or to use the telephone, or to be let into a vehicle for a ride somewhere, or to be led to some store/landmark. The intended victim is terrified for some reason unknown to them (at the time), but wants to help the children. The children speak confidently, using the mannerisms and vocabulary of someone much more mature. The victim feels as if he or she has been hypnotised, then for some reason snaps out of it, notices the children's black eyes, and panics. There are some variations on this, but this is a typical encounter.

Some of these variations, rare as they may be, include the possible answer to the question of what happens once you've invited the BEKs in. One story shared by *Darkness Radio*'s Dave Schrader on Jim Harold's *Paranormal Podcast* [4] featured a bedroom invasion by BEKs. A couple had been relaxing at home on a rainy night when the wife looked out of the window, wondering why kids were playing outside in such inclement weather. Something about the kids unnerved her, but she went back to her business and forgot about them… until later that night when she awoke in her bed to find three children standing over her. They all had the requisite obsidian eyes. Her first instinct was to scream,

> "Sometimes they ask to be let into the house for a glass of water"

but the closest child tried to calm her by saying: "Shhh… don't speak. We just want to look at you." This, understandably, had the opposite effect, but when she tried to wake her husband the children disappeared.

Many cases feature a coda in which some misfortune befalls the recipient of the visitation. These vary in severity. One case shared by David Weatherly on Jim Harold's *Plus Club Preview* [5] tells of a mother in a small American town who pulls up to a convenience store in her SUV with her 10-year-old son in the back. Leaving the child in the back of the car she pops into the store, returning just minutes later. She's about to drive away when she checks in the rear view mirror and sees a pair of cold black eyes staring back at her. Spinning around, she sees an older boy sitting next to her son on the back seat. She jumps out of the car and pulls her son out, making for the safety of the convenience store. The clerk of the store goes out to check the SUV moments later, but there is no sign of any invader.

Too afraid to get back into the car, the woman calls her husband, who drives to the store in his truck. To calm her nerves he agrees to swap vehicles and drives away in the SUV, only to end up in a car crash a couple of miles from their home. The SUV was totalled, but thankfully the husband wasn't seriously hurt. Following this incident, the son fell ill. The myriad symptoms kept changing – from stomach cramps to measles-like rashes – and no cause was ascertained. Eventually, after many weeks, the child returned to health.

The mother questioned her son about the strange car invader, asking whether he knew him from school. Her son answered that he had never seen him before and that the boy had walked up to the SUV as soon as she had gone into the store and asked whether he could come to his house. Being naïve and welcoming to company, the 10-year-old had invited the stranger into the car.

Mysterious illnesses following encounters with black-eyed beings are tantalisingly akin to tales of encounters with 'Grey' aliens – as is the theme of missing time, which also plays a part in a tale shared by Dave Schrader on the *Paranormal Podcast* concerning newlyweds honeymooning in the Caribbean. Walking along the beach at twilight, they see a young girl in what appears to be a nightdress beckoning to them further down the beach. She is calling for help. Worried, the couple run toward her, asking what is wrong. The girl moves further and further away, heading for the sea. When she enters the surf the newlyweds stop, knowing something isn't right. The girl turns to them, beckoning them towards her, and now they can see her more clearly they realise she has… (you guessed it) completely black eyes. Suddenly mortally afraid, they run back down the beach. It's at this point that they realise they've moved a quarter of a mile down the beach in what seemed to be only moments. Retracing their steps, they notice they can see only their own footprints in the sand; the BEK has gone and seems never to have been there.

"A screaming black-eyed child"

A female BEK is a rarity, but the story shares this facet with the recent news of the appearance – or reappearance – of a "screaming black-eyed child" in Cannock Chase. The story, published in the *Daily Star* on 30 September 2014, introduced BEKs to the UK and kicked off a flood of follow-on reports ranging from the implausible to the outright ridiculous, including BEKs in the London Underground, in students' wardrobes, haunting the sets of *Coronation Street* and

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

JENNY COLEMAN searches for the cultural roots of the Black-Eyed Kids

Oculus animi index: "The eye is the index of the mind."

The modern variant of this Latin proverb is the oft-used "The eyes are the window to the soul."

There is comfort in such familiar truisms, and indeed another person's eyes are what capture our immediate attention upon introduction. We seek nonverbal cues from the eyes of our partners, our friends, our family; we are able to convey anger, fear, sadness, joy and love with a mere, swift wrinkling or winking or tear. Romantic poets write about the depths of a lover's eyes, the colour, the sparkle; mothers gaze lovingly at their infants, waiting for the droop of a tiny eyelid, the fairy brush of lashes in sleep. One's eyes can harden, darken, dilate, or narrow; and thereby broadcast sexual desire, jealously, violent intent. What is beautiful one moment can, in a millisecond's blink, become terrible.

The eyes of children are generally assumed to hold all the unscathed mystery of innocence. Wide open, they devour an environment still new and interesting, and show trust without irony, not yet jaded. Rarely do adults have trouble meeting a child's gaze, recognizing simple curiosity, no matter how fervent the stare.

But what if a child's eyes aren't full of innocence, but the opposite? If the downcast gaze, obscured by shadow or hair or clothing, reveals itself to be full of malice, of black snakes and empty souls? If the little boy on your doorstep, asking to use your phone because he is lost, fills you with gut-twisting, primal terror so profound you slam the door in the kid's face, only to have him pound on it with his tiny fists and demand: "LET ME IN!"

BACK TO THE NINETIES

If the BEKs seem oddly familiar, it's probably because the groundbreaking and insanely popular television show *The X-Files* featured the "black oil virus" in several of its extraterrestrial-themed episodes, starting with "Piper Maru" in 1996. Alien colonists sought to infect other alien races with the black oil, also termed "Purity." This substance was used to infect humanoid hosts and create a slave race. Purity is considered a sentient substance, able to communicate host-to-host, and revealing itself through the eyes: pure black eyes, swimming in opaque, dark oil.

1996 was also the year the film *The Craft* was released. The movie portrays four Catholic schoolgirls, outcasts, whose dabbling in witchcraft results in violence, betrayal, and a power that ultimately

OLEG NIKISHIN / GETTY IMAGES

spirals out of control. In one memorable scene, the girls' leader, Nancy, levitates, eyes dilated and nearly black, her toes scraping the ground, as she advances upon Sarah. Black-Eyed Kids have been reported to "hover" and "levitate" eerily, and become enraged when denied their requests to enter a home or vehicle, particularly if their true nature is suspected.

The 1996 television premiere of the series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* featured the character Willow, a teen witch with powerful abilities – an outcast with an "insanely colourful interior life, that only shy people have", as show creator Joss Whedon put it. While the series maintained neutrality in its portrayal of Wiccan practice, the misuse of magical power is illustrated in Willow's decline during the fifth season: when she resorts to dark magic, her eyes and hair become coal black. It is telling that while the ethics of Willow's power prove that, when used for selfish or manipulative reasons, it becomes uncontrollable and dark, it is also during these times that her power increases exponentially.

The year after the premiere of *Buffy* and the introduction of "black oil," 1997, the American metal/rap band Limp Bizkit hit the music video scene, with guitarist Wes Borland's appearance a study in black-eyed menace. Borland's use of pale face and body makeup and black contact lenses lent a disturbing edge to his already aggressive presence and musical ability.

Borland stated in 2002, upon leaving the band, that he feared his "heart [was] going black." Yet, despite his fears, Borland temporarily joined forces with Marilyn Manson in 2008. Marilyn Manson, the band, formed in 1994 and having gained mainstream popularity in (you guessed it) 1996 – is known for its controversial performances decrying religion, glorifying evil, and pushing the limits of misconduct. The band was known at its inception as Marilyn Manson and the Spooky Kids. The performer Brian Warner, also known professionally as Marilyn Manson, with his black contact lenses and ghastly, pale appearance (pictured left), carved out an unsettling (if somewhat hollow and pretentious) presence for himself, inspiring legions of followers to emulate him.

Manson/Warner was partially blamed for the 1999 school shooting in Columbine, Colorado, as the song "KILL KILL KILL" is said to have inspired the young male shooters, who ran up and down the halls screaming "Marilyn Manson rules!" while murdering their classmates. Manson, of course, stated that his music had nothing to do with the Columbine incident, and was featured in Michael Moore's 2002 documentary, *Bowling for Columbine*, in full stage makeup, including black contact lenses.

The 1990s, too, saw the mainstream explosion of alien abduction lore, and BEKs have also been thought of as alien/human hybrids or "Greys in disguise." BEKs are often described as having a greyish pallor and, being "children," are obviously physically small. Greys are also said to have telepathic powers, rendering their subjects motionless and unable to escape; BEKs are said to be so convincing in their requests that, despite the gut-wrenching unease they inspire, they are very hard to turn away.

We might also compare the BEKs to the MiB, or Men in Black; both appear in twos or threes, speaking in an odd manner from the shadows and disappearing as quickly as they appear, insinuating themselves physically as well as in the emotions and minds of their subjects. While the modus operandi of the MiB is shrouded in government conspiracy and cover-ups, with a distinct odour of the extraterrestrial, the BEKs' motives are even less clear.

It is not, then, inconceivable that the 1990s, with the birth of the Internet and these kinds of cultural influences, also brought forth the mythos of the Black-Eyed Kids. Said to be, in turn, vampires, alien hybrids, witches, shapeshifters, or simply naughty children playing pranks, the BEKs have all the hallmarks of urban legend.

CINEMATIC BAD SEEDS

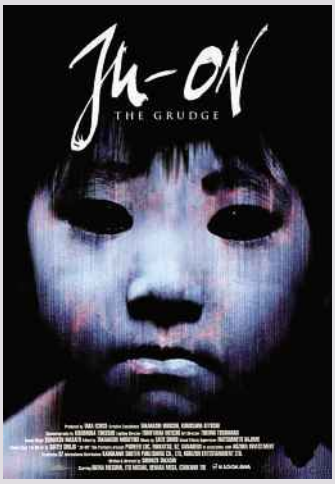
While earlier films – from *The Bad Seed* (1956) and *Village of the Damned* (1960) to *The Omen* (1976) – present supposedly innocent children as threats, the BEKs seem to be the hellspawn of the mid-to-late Nineties and have appeared in numerous films since then.

The Grudge, a 2004 American film starring Buffy herself, Sarah Michelle Gellar, also featured Black-Eyed Kids. Based upon the Japanese horror franchise *Ju-on*, the plot has the ghosts of murdered child Toshio, his mother, and his cat wreaking post-mortem havoc upon the murder house's new inhabitants. According to *Ju-on*, or

"curse grudge," when a person dies filled with deep rage, particularly by means of violence, a curse is born. Little Toshio in both the Japanese and American versions of the film possesses totally black eyes and is an oppressive, unstoppable stalker of both films' protagonists.

2008's *The Strangers* portrays a young couple in a remote vacation house, terrorised by three people in masks, who for 89 brutal minutes try to gain entry into the couple's home. The initial contact with their tormentors comes as a knock at the door; a blonde girl whose downcast eyes are obscured by low light asks for "Tamara". When told she has the wrong house, she asks: "Are you sure?" in a robotic monotone. High-pitched giggling, high-voltage suspense and high-velocity violence ensue, with a nasty end. The female lead at one point tearfully asks the blonde girl, called Dollface, whose white mask and black, hollow eyes are directly relatable to the BEK mythos: "Why are you doing this?" To which Dollface replies: "Because you were home." The film's director, Bryan Bertino, has been quoted as saying he was inspired by the infamous Manson Family murders of 1969 (Charles Manson, of course, being the "Manson" in Marilyn Manson).

The 2004 vampire novel, *Let the Right One In*, and its subsequent movie adaptations – the Swedish *Let the Right One In* (2008) and the US *Let Me In* (2010) – also explore the children-as-potential-killers theme, this time with a main character who is a bullied outcast befriended by a mysterious child with dark eyes, of few words, and from a mysterious past: Oskar and Eli, respectively. Eli begs entry into Oskar's home, and in typical vampire fashion, cannot enter without Oskar's permission, which he grants. Eli admits that she/he is an ancient soul, dependent upon human blood, yet there is a poignancy and kindness about Eli and her/his love for Oskar that humanises the story. Following a string of criminal activity, the two run off together, leaving behind the real world. By "letting the right one in," Oskar is "saved" from a mediocre life of playground bullying and parental nagging.



Interest in the Black-Eyed Children escalated to new levels in February 2013, with an MSN "Weekly Strange" posting recounting Brian Bethel's seminal encounter (see p26). Coinciding with the MSN posting was the 20 December 2012, premiere of the indie film *Sunshine Girl and the Hunt for the Black Eyed Kids* in the Kiggins Theatre of Clark County, Vancouver. Director Nick Hagen, known for his creepy You Tube horror series *Haunted Sunshine Girl*, stated that while the movie is a spinoff from the series, reports of the Black-Eyed Kids were "very real" and that incidents of them approaching homes and cars for help and demanding to be "let in" have been documented for years, particularly in the Portland, Oregon, area (*The Columbian*, 14 Dec 2012). Said by one of the film's producers to be the first full-length film devoted specifically to the subject of BEKs, it is actually the second, following 2011's aptly named *The Black Eyed Children*. Brian Bethel is credited as a writer, and the movie trailer has a decidedly low-budget look. The storyline is not terribly adventurous; a young girl is plagued by black-eyed ne'er do wells following a family tragedy. It was shot in Hagerstown, MD.

Several current Kickstarter.com campaigns request funding for Black-Eyed Children projects, suggesting that the subject is the current creepy darling of the low-budget, indie filmmaker.

Like any good tale, especially one that is salted with plenty of humankind's innate fears of the unknown, creepy children, unreadable emotion and mind control, the Black-Eyed Kids are having their 15 minutes of fame. Add the far-reaching power of the Internet and social media, writers, directors and bloggers with fertile imaginations and fervent desires to satisfy a public hungry to be frightened, and you have yourself a mythos.

It remains to be seen whether the BEKs will inspire the criminal acts that their popular cousin Slender Man has. One desperately hopes not. But there is within us all a dark vein, that – when weakened by circumstances beyond our control, be it childhood bullies or grown-up heartaches – opens itself to the bite of the vampire, the mental probing of the evil telepath, the blade of the unbalanced. The stories may be empty words, but the people who believe them are full of dark potential.

JENNY COLEMAN is the author of "Shadows of the Thin Man," about Slenderman (FT317:34-35). She lives in Bangor, Maine, with her husband Loren Coleman and Fergus the dog.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

More recent "sightings," complete with photos, can be found aplenty online, particularly on sites such as Reddit.com, YouTube, and Facebook; the ubiquitous creepypasta.com also has its version of Brian Bethel's 1996 encounter.

2012: A young North Carolina woman spots a weird, pale boy talking to an elderly woman; while the woman digs in her purse, the boy fixes his dead, black stare on the younger female, who promptly flees the scene.

A UFO experiencer (abductee) notices a group of teenagers talking on a frigid, East Coast evening; while the "normal" children exhale plumes of steamy breath in the cold air, the ones with the dull, black eyes don't seem to breathe at all. The same fellow, later, is begged by a scantily dressed young woman to be allowed into his house, and again, despite the chilly temperature, she exudes no visible breath nor shows signs of discomfort in the cold.

2013: A new mother in her early 20s hears shuffling at the front door; her dog goes wild, and then whimpers in terror. Through the peephole, she spies two girls in hoodies, eyes downcast. Without looking up, and without being addressed or otherwise acknowledged, the older one speaks: "We need to come in. We need a phone."
Her mind seemingly manipulated telepathically, the woman reaches for the doorknob – but her baby's cry stops her and it's then that the hooded girls look up with black eyes.

2014: Children at the Mexico/United States border accost passing cars in full daylight, clamouring at the windows, demanding to be let in and piercing the vehicles' occupants with eyes of dull onyx.

Photographs of the begging children's faces pressed against the windows can be found on several websites dedicated to the BEK phenomenon, but it is highly likely these children are simply the innocent offspring of desperation and poverty, their pictures creatively Photoshopped.

Strictly Come Dancing and mixing memes by appearing in evil clown versions.[6]

The Cannock Chase story concerned a sighting during the summer of 2014 in which a mother and daughter were walking through the Birches Valley area of the Staffordshire beauty spot. They heard the screams of a child, seemingly nearby, and ran toward the sound, fearing the worst. "We couldn't find the child anywhere and so stopped to catch our breath. That's when I turned round and saw a girl stood behind me, no more than 10 years old, with her hands over her eyes. She then put her arms down by her side and opened her eyes, which is when I saw they were completely black – no iris, no white, nothing." [7] When the woman's maternal instincts kicked in and she turned to grab her daughter, the BEK disappeared.

Apparently, this wasn't the first time the Cannock Chase area had been haunted by a black-eyed little girl ghost. Local paranormal investigator and author Lee Brickley told the *Daily Star* that his own aunt, meeting with friends as a teenager back in 1982, had heard similar screams for help in the same area just before dark. As in the recent case, she ran further into the countryside to find the distressed child. She saw a small girl, about six years old, on a dirt track, running ahead of her. Before disappearing into some dark woodland, the girl turned around to reveal her black eyes. Despite this bizarre physical feature the girl in this case was considered to be flesh and blood. As Brickley told the *Daily Star* reporter: "There was a police search, but to no avail. At the time, no one had any reason to believe there was anything paranormal going on."

The latest sighting – and the re-emergence of the older one – led to the area being visited by reporters, paranormal investigators and psychics, including Christine Hamlett, whose claims – and alleged photographs of the ghost – featured in a handful of *Daily Star* articles [8]

LEE BRICKLEY

inferring connections to the devastation of the Cannock Chase area by the Black Death and more recent outbreaks of diphtheria. Another, perhaps more obvious, connection (that the paper didn't make) would be to the infamous Cannock Chase Murders of 1964-7 committed by Raymond Leslie Morris (convicted for the murder of seven-year old Christine Darby and suspected of murdering Margaret Reynolds, six, and Diana Joy Tift, five), despite the ages matching the original ghostly sighting from the 1980s.

It will come as no surprise to forteans that the reporting in the *Daily Star* has been far from accurate, and that the paper has embellished the actual accounts in the sensational manner for which it is notorious. Lee Brickley, the original contact for the newspaper and apparent source of much of the material, claims that he has been misquoted. He told me that: "The press have got it all wrong when reporting on these sightings. No witness, other than the ones with the rather dubious photographs, have ever claimed the child looked ghostly. In fact, most of them didn't even realise she was anything more than a normal child until she got close enough for them to see her black eyes. Screaming is again another tabloid falsification. In most instances, the child has been said to giggle. There was one case where the child was said to sound as if in distress, but to my knowledge screaming has never come up."

What do they want?

Similarities to alien encounters – missing time, illness following encounters, totally black eyes without irises or pupils – have not gone unnoticed. Whispers of alien/human hybrids reverberate around the Internet and over the airwaves. The ubiquitous Lee Brickley – as quoted or misquoted in the *Daily Star* about the Cannock Chase encounters – hints heavily at the extraterrestrial nature of the BEKs, drawing connections with an increase in UFO sightings in the area. [9]

The entities encountered also bear a resemblance to many of the other usual suspects in paranormal and supernatural lore, like a sort of greatest hits of the spooky and monstrous. They look like ghosts, but have alien eyes; they need to be invited in, like vampires; and they can beckon and lure us – perhaps to our doom – like Sirens.

The BEKs also share common ground with a lot of urban legends, especially those cautionary tales that punish the kind and helpful. Separating the mythology from the arguable reality of the entities for a moment, we might ask why this warning about trusting seemingly innocent children endures.

First and foremost, the BEK encounter offers a good scary story with a twist: like many other such stories, it thrives on initial perceptions of safety and innocence being overturned. But why children? And why now?

Taking a functionalist approach – focusing

TOP: Local researcher Lee Brickley, who provided background on the Cannock Chase BEKs. **ABOVE:** Some of the front-page headlines carried by the *Daily Star* newspaper.

NICK HAGEN

ABOVE: Independent films about BEKs, like director Nick Hagen's spin-off from his *Haunted Sunshine Girl* YouTube series, are being funded through Kickstarter.

on the beneficial societal messages gleaned from myths – we might ask what possible benefit to society could come from spreading the idea that young children are not to be trusted. Is it a response to violent juvenile crime, with social media as the accomplice? Does it feed off reported crazes for "happy slapping" complete strangers, or the even more abhorrent "Knock-out game" in which the aim is to actually knock people unconscious, all the while filming the victim and uploading the result to sites like Youtube? Or does it just reflect the increasing gulf of understanding between the generations triggered by the younger generation's use of technology, online communication and gaming?

And what might be the benefit of the other warning made by these tales: don't help children seemingly in need? If the phenomenon had started in the UK, we could possibly find some rationale for it; after all, we've endured distressing cases like Baby P, the Rotherham abuse scandal and murders like that of Jamie Bulger, where countless people saw the toddler being led away by two kids he clearly didn't want to be with but not one adult intervened. Might such a warning salve our collective conscience by suggesting that we *shouldn't* try to help children? Perhaps, in a culture in which the fear of accusations of pædophilia has become very real, keeping one's distance has become the only sensible course of action.

Jason Offutt is not convinced that these myth-like dimensions are the leading force in the BEK craze. "I've spoken with people who are convinced BEKs are demonic entities, *djinn*, elementals, or extraterrestrial hybrids," he told me. "One man I spoke to claimed to *be* one of these entities… and a descendent of the serpent from Genesis. Whatever they are, I've interviewed people from four continents who have encountered BEKs and they are convinced BEKs are real."

So should we brace ourselves for an invasion by Black-Eyed Kids/Djinn/Demons/Alien Hybrids? The oft-misquoted Mr Brickley seemed to think so, telling (or not) the *Daily Star* that a "mass happening" was likely to take place in October 2014. "I believe reports and the frequency of sightings will increase in the run-up to October 27 because there are crazy things going on at Cannock Chase… I believe it is entirely possible the world could change significantly if these creatures decide to reveal themselves." [10] Sean Page, described as a "fellow paranormal expert", agreed, adding sternly that "Governments across the globe must take this seriously."

Well, as the date for the invasion has passed with seemingly little consequence, perhaps we need not concern ourselves at this moment in time – although the same newspaper did allege subsequent reports of BEKs from its readership in Liverpool, Scotland and the south west. [11]

Black eyes as a feature of supernatural entities are nothing particularly new, so why are they so omnipresent just now? Perhaps the answer lies in the medium the BEKs have thrived on – the Internet. Black-Eyed Kids offer just the kind of snappy, search-engine-and-podcast-title-friendly slogan that draws an audience in. As a marketing concept, it's a winner. And once you've heard one BEK story told chillingly on a radio show or podcast, you crave more.

Whatever the reality of the entities themselves, it's certain that the viral mythology of the BEKs is not going away. Now the tabloids have injected it into the subconscious of the UK, we join a growing fraternity of countries across the world with knowledge and experience of the Black-Eyed Kids. Hollywood movies are sure to follow – although the preponderance of demonic black eyes in film and TV since the 1990s is surely a contributory factor to those reportedly seen in real life.

So this Christmas – the traditional time for telling ghost stories – grab a mince pie and a glass of mulled wine, pull your chair nearer the virtual fireplace and listen to terrifying tales of the Black-Eyed Kids. FT

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STUART FERROL is a writer, actor and comedian from north east England who has previously written for FT on the Hexham Heads and other subjects.

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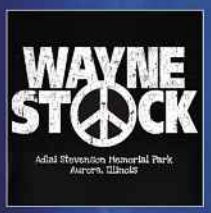

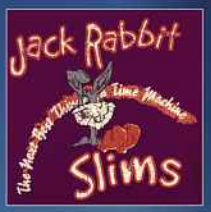

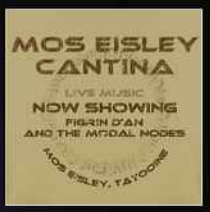

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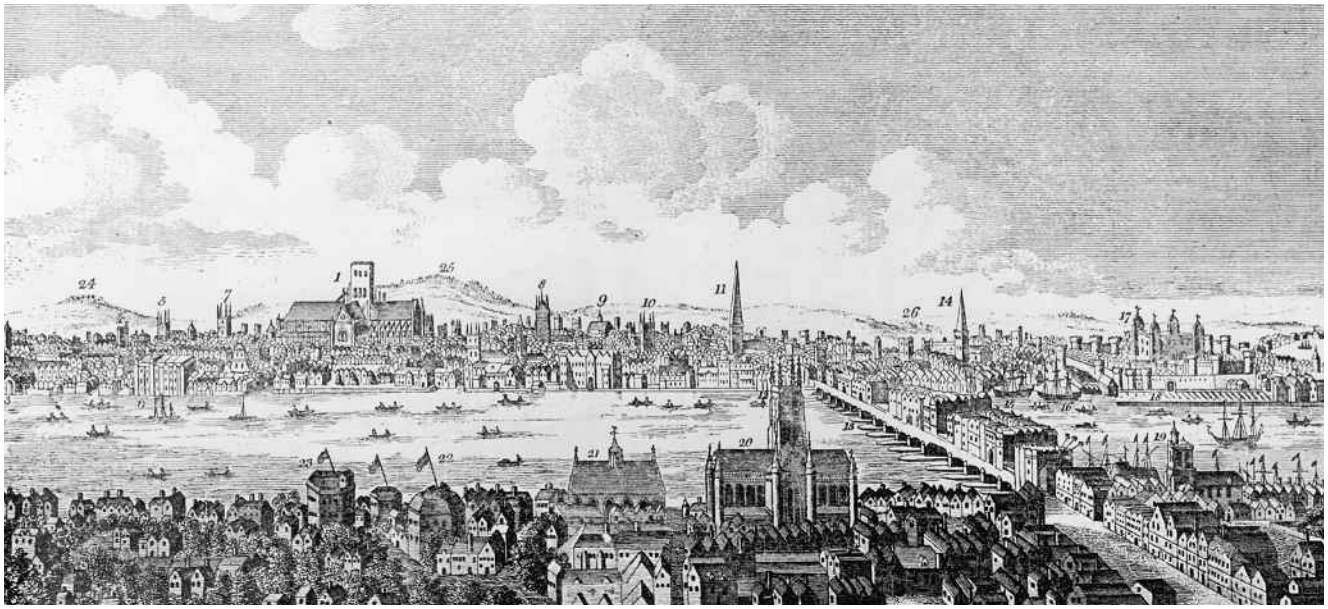
CROSS BONES

Cross Bones graveyard is a unique site in modern London, a place where the forgotten spirits of Southwark prostitutes have been conjured back into memory by a contemporary shaman-poet. **FAYE LIPSON** unearths the cemetery's strange history and attends an unusual ritual blurring the sacred and the profane...



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

On a close July evening in the long shadow of London's Shard, a motley, slightly hippyish little group is crowded against a set of gates festooned with dolls, ribbons and totemic offerings. Flanking them are two older men in hi-vis tabards bearing the legend "Goose Samurai". They are chivying the group's outliers back from the road and onto the pavement. Between these unlikely warriors stands writer and performer John Constable, in his shamanic trickster persona of 'John Crow'. Tall, patrician, white of hair and tooth with a warmly crooked smile, he is swinging an incense burner and using a feather to waft scent along the pavement edge, delineating the ritual space, the blurred line between the sacred and profane. Hush falls on those assembled. Crow returns to the front of the gates and chimes a bell. The vigil is ready to begin.

Cross Bones is a place referred to just as often by more prosaic or colloquial monikers – single women's graveyard, prostitute's graveyard – as it is by its official name. This is fitting, for the place has a most remarkable and unusual relationship with officialdom.

A MOTLEY GROUP IS CROWDED AGAINST A SET OF GATES FESTOONED WITH OFFERINGS

Murmurings about an unconsecrated burial ground for mediæval whores first reached my ears in the high-tech environs of a media firm's office in nearby Borough Market in 2012. Armed only with a colleague's casual mention of the place, I set off one lunchtime for Redcross Way.

The gates, though unattended when I found them, were evidently a locus of activity. Every inch of the bars was covered in little offerings of fabric, ribbons bearing names and dates, poems on laminated cards and most poignantly, pictures of the dead and departed. Behind the gates was a scrubby patch of concrete. The stub of a joss stick stood in a holder on the ground.

A brass plaque with a picture of a goose was fixed to the gates. It read: "Cross Bones Graveyard. In mediæval times this was an unconsecrated graveyard for prostitutes or 'Winchester Geese'. By the 18th century it had become a paupers' burial ground, which closed in 1853. Here, local people have created a memorial shrine. The Outcast Dead. RIP."

To understand the provenance of the term "Winchester Goose", we must take a short stroll to nearby Clink Street. There lie the ruins of the Bishop of Winchester's Palace

OLI SCARFF / GETTY IMAGES

Cross Bones
Graveyard
In medieval times this was an unconsecrated graveyard for prostitutes or 'Winchester Geese' By the 18th century it had become a paupers' burial ground, which closed in 1853. Here, local people have created a memorial shrine.
The Outcast Dead
R.I.P

OLI SCARFF / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The gates of Cross Bones cemetery, festooned with offerings of all kinds: scraps of fabric, ribbons, dolls, poems and pictures of the dead and departed.

– now incorporated into the side of a modern office block – and the site of the eponymous Clink prison, now a tourist trap museum. The area, known partly in jest by its mediæval inhabitants as "the Liberty of the Clink", was under the ordnance of the Bishop of Winchester, and it was he who licensed and guaranteed the liberty of prostitutes of the area. Lying outside the City proper, the locale could offer services and vices forbidden just across the river. Brothels, taverns and bear-baiting abounded.

If it seems extraordinary to our modern minds that a churchman would license women's sex work, author Paul Slade reminds us that "it's important to understand that bishops in mediæval England were not just churchmen, but politicians and statesmen too. Winchester was one of the oldest, richest and most important dioceses in the country at this time, which ensured its Bishop a great deal of influence." [1] The reformation of Henry VIII did much to wrest this historic political power from the Church's hands.

Therein lies the most compelling tension which propels the Cross Bones story forward today: the binary of the sacred and profane writ large on 15,000 bodies, lying one atop another in a small patch of earth near London Bridge. Perhaps it was inevitable that someone with a writerly and poetic bent would find their way to Cross Bones and become its champion, of sorts.

CROW GETS THE GOOSE

John Constable arrived in Southwark in 1986, in search of an unfurnished flat. Such places were there in abundance, for before the Jubilee line was extended south of the river, the area was a rough and decayed industrial wasteland notable for underground raves, drug addiction and violent crime. Taxi drivers would refuse to take you there. Where new towers of commerce now stand, unused warehouses clanked and creaked in the wind.

> "I WAS BORN A GOOSE OF SOUTHWARK BY THE GRACE OF MARY OVARY"

A playwright with an interest in shamanism and the arcane, Constable was seeking inspiration for the dawning Millennium and, obligingly, it struck. He explains: "In 1996 it came to me when I was in Borough Market listening to a steel band. The words 'the Southwark mysteries' drifted through my head. And I thought, that's what I'm going to write for the Millennium." (For a full account of *The Southwark Mysteries*, see **FT264:38-39**).

In October of that year, while still incubating this idea, he sat down to do a free-associative creative exercise in his John Crow persona. He describes it as "some experimental John Crow writing, which is writing where you try and get out of the way and not have a conscious agenda. That was the day that I got the Goose.

"About 11pm I was writing away. It was as if this character entered and started to tell her own story, all in verse. It was an exciting and," he pauses, "a very fearful experience."

The character of the Goose is the linchpin of *The Southwark Mysteries*, which was born as a collection of verse, songs and drama in the style of mediæval mystery plays, inspired by that moment of creative "visitation". She wears many personæ within the work, becoming trickster spirit, prophetess, storyteller and the Liberty's spiritual warden by turns. In the opening verse of its first chapter, The Book of the Goose, she proclaims:

> *I was born a Goose of Southwark*
> *by the Grace of Mary Ovary,*
> *whose Bishop gives me license*
> *to sin within the Liberty.* [2]

Constable is reluctant to analyse what happened to him on that October night, refusing to be drawn on whether the Goose is an independent agency with an autonomous existence. Does he regard her as a paranormal entity – a goddess or a spirit?

"I think that distinction, what's within and without yourself, is perhaps in some ways a false one. That really, it's all mind. We are mind and consciousness. That's where I've been led by this. I'm primarily a playwright. What happened is not purely spooky. As a writer you're trying to find characters who speak for themselves, who have their own back stories and histories.

"The experience wasn't a vision in terms of seeing a ghost, and I can never be sure if I heard the Goose. I certainly spoke her aloud."

Yet Constable is a man steeped in spiritual and ritualistic practice. He has travelled the world studying and engaging in various shamanistic traditions, including the African-Brazilian faith Umbanda. He explains that the words chanted at the close of each monthly Crossbones vigil – "Life! Love! Happiness! Open Pathways!" were revealed to him by a Brazilian Umbanda practitioner during one of her trance sessions.

This is just one of an eclectic array of faiths and symbols included in the vigils. On this occasion he presents to the crowd a beautifully illustrated banner depicting "Our Lady of Guadeloupe," an incarnation of the Virgin Mary that has been lovingly crafted by some of the vigil regulars. The Heart Sutra, "a Buddhist text relating to complete emptiness," is another favoured recitation.

Virgin Mary symbolism chimes particularly well with the proceedings when one layers history and mythology on top of one another. She is the namesake of Mary Overie, an apocryphal saint who founded a seventh century nunnery where Southwark Cathedral now stands. The Overie character is invoked repeatedly within *The Southwark Mysteries* alongside the Roman-Egyptian goddess Isis, who, Constable is keen to point out, was herself the likely subject of a cult in Roman Bankside. The evidence comes in the form of "a pottery jug unearthed in Southwark and dated c AD100, [which] bears the inscription: *Londini Ad Fanum Isidis* – In London at the Temple of Isis." [3]

In the poems, the Goose, Overie and Isis seem to combine into an arch trickster-whore goddess embodying both traditional Christian purity and mediæval bawdry. It's all part of a personal manifesto, a philosophy of compassion for "humans in our fallen state" which Constable expounds at length.

SOPHIE GAINSLEY

He believes that mediæval Christianity "included the things that later began to be excluded from the realm of the sacred: sexuality, comedy.

"I felt the mediæval mind can move from contemplating the heavens in awe and then having a dirty belly laugh, almost in the same breath. *The Southwark Mysteries* is written in that carnivalesque spirit.

"We've ended up believing creeds. This has gone so deep into the Western mind that Marxism, anarchism and post-religious thinking are still hugely conditioned by it. All of this [work with the Goose] points to a system that is more compassionate."

A sceptical mind might survey the Constable/Crow manifesto and find evidence of a spiritual consumerism – a kind of hermetic shopping spree in which one buys up disparate religious practices and deploys them at random. Certainly Constable is adamant that he subscribes to no one faith.

"I very deliberately try not to define myself as belonging to any 'ism'. Many people identify me as a Pagan and ask me to speak on behalf of Pagans, which I usually refuse to do. I've been called a Pagan, a Christian, a Buddhist and a shaman. And I'm all – or really, none – of the above. I'm not in the business of belief systems, except as a launch-point for a practice or body of work."

But what is his own work really about? He is a self-described practitioner of "magical thinking", reframing the world outside of material terms and into an infinite map of poetic connections across space and time, such as the Goose-Overie-Isis melding.

"The shamanism I do, I would identify with a repatterning of the world. In other words it's the same world everybody sees, but if you shift the angle and your points of emphasis, a whole new world can reveal itself. It seemed that when I behaved as if the Goose were real and I was there to serve her, I found the world did seem to reconfigure itself. All of this work I see as a working hypothesis rather than trying to achieve a complete belief system."

When his practice is framed in this way, the "spiritual shopping" accusation seems, to my mind at least, unfounded. He's a far cry from someone who consumes a morning yoga class only as calisthenics, glugs Lourdes holy water at lunchtime and casts a spell for wealth in the evening. Escaping the world of the material to explore the resonances between different cultures and times is an inclusive and unselfish activity, which can – and does, as I witness – bring people together. In that sense, his practice actively does some good.

THE OUTCAST DEAD

Some time after having "got the Goose," Constable was intrigued to learn of a purported single women's graveyard on Redcross Way, which seemed to strongly

OLI SCARFF / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: John Constable, in his 'John Crow' persona, leading a vigil at Cross Bones in July 2014. **ABOVE:** Some of the offerings left for the 'Outcast Dead' at the cemetery gates.

accord with his *Southwark Mysteries* writings. He goes so far as to say: "The evidence began to mount up that things I'd written in the poem were real things that – certainly consciously – I didn't know."

The first reference to a site within the parish being used as a final resting place for prostitutes was made by yet another John, historian John Stow, in 1598: "I have heard of ancient men, of good credit, report that these single women were forbidden the rites of the Church, so long as they continued that sinful life, and were excluded from Christian burial, if they were not reconciled before their death. And therefore there was a plot of ground called the Single Woman's churchyard, appointed for them far from the parish church." [4]

Whilst the Redcross Way site isn't specifically named as the location, evidence from bones unearthed there during the Jubilee Line extension of the 1990s strongly indicates that the site was used in this way. Among the (mostly female) 148 bodies retrieved was 'Cross Bones girl', a 19th-century teenager with tertiary sexually transmitted syphilis and indicators of repeated reinfection, who very likely contracted the disease through prostitution.[5] A third of the bodies examined were what is termed perinatal – at least 22 weeks pregnant at the time of death – or had given birth just days before their demise. [6]

The Cross Bones vigils organised by Constable and other unofficial friends of the site – which occur on the 23rd of every month at the graveyard gates – were in turn born out of a proto-event called the Hallowe'en of Cross Bones.

"In 1998, as it approached the second anniversary [of the Goose's appearance], I'd clarified that I was there to serve the Goose. One of my principal obligations was to remember the Cross Bones dead in an active and purposeful way. It was on Hallowe'en 1998 and we had elements of pagan ritual relating to Hallowe'en, or Samhain.

"We had a tantric sex worker hold the space and lead people in very simple and non-threatening pelvic work, then selective text from the poems. This ended with a procession to the gates. Everybody lit a candle... Very soon, we adopted the tradition of writing down 123 names selected from the London Metropolitan Archive. Everybody adopted a spirit for the night. At the gates everyone would read the name of their dead person, symbolising all the unknown dead."

As it transpired, one problem with holding an annual event was that the ribbons and totems people left soon turned to tatters. A monthly ritual seemed the ideal way to keep the gates refreshed, and so the first vigil was held in June 2004, with the Pagan elements retained and reworked.

THE VIGIL

At the 122nd consecutive vigil I am handed a white ribbon to tie to the gates with a few whispered words of my own choosing, before being led in a song from *The Southwark Mysteries.*

Then comes a more freewheeling section in which any of the ritual's celebrants – there are about 30 – can hold the space with a poem, song or short speech. Despite Constable telling me that Druids and Pagans sometimes attend, this "group of the outcast" isn't that far-out in appearance. Crow himself (for he is always Crow during these rituals), in a Virgin Mary T-shirt layered with a blue patterned garment and heavy beads, is the most esoteric of the group.

An older woman in layered skirts steps forward and recites a poem of her own devising about the Green Man figure, a Pagan entity which lives on as a foliate head carved into British churches. There's that Christo-Pagan connection once again, chiming in with the proceedings.

Other speakers and singers address the old bones of Cross Bones more directly. A lady starts to sing for the dead children – both in the graves beneath us and in the world's numerous war zones – when an alarming bang halts everything. A transit van, squeezing through the bottleneck formed by the crowd on one side and a parked car on the other, has damaged the car's wing mirror.

Crow's face is lit up with alarm for less than a moment. Immediately he brings the collective consciousness back to the vigil, urging the singer to resume – which she does, falteringly. After the song is finished he exhorts the crowd to carry on through life's bangs and scrapes. Tense faces relax into a smile at the very New Age but sincere piece of advice.

Finally he ushers in Sion, a homeless man who has taken up temporary residence outside the Cross Bones gates. Earlier that day, after our interview, Constable had asked me to accompany him on the short walk from Borough High Street to the graveyard. We

BOTH PHOTOS: SOPHIE GAINSLEY

ABOVE: Some of the celebrants at a typical Cross Bones vigil (this one hed in July 2014): some make speeches, recite poetry or sing.

found Sion sitting on a blanket where he had evidently also slept.

It was clear from their exchange that the two were friends. Constable referred to him as "Siony" and gently reminded him that although Cross Bones was a place for the outcast, his sleeping there could provide grounds for TfL (Transport for London) to remove the gates (which, some months previously, they had threatened to do). Sion replied that he slept there both to protect the gates and because the horrors of street life led him to feel connected with those interred in the ground.

Now at the vigil, Sion is standing in front of a rapt audience. He speaks animatedly: "On the streets, I've seen death, and the most horrible, awful things – you would not believe. These people buried here, they've seen awful things too, and they should be remembered. I think it's very nice that you people have taken the time to come here to remember them. So thank you, bless you."

The group erupts into applause, visibly moved. Now I feel a little of that Cross Bones "magical thinking" which Constable talked about: the power of compassion to enfold the marginalised. My perspective on the world – on this noisy London street – has shifted imperceptibly. "Very often, it'll be someone we don't expect – a Druid, a homeless person, a visitor from across the world, even a child – who will change completely the mood and the atmosphere."

As the vigil draws to a close we are invited to crowd in, either touching the gates or touching someone who is, centring everyone on the same spot. Crow seals us into a circle with a few liberal splashes of Gordon's gin and we chanted the Umbanda shaman's mantra. Some 10 minutes later, the crowd disperses.

A LITTLE MAGICAL THINKING...

Three weeks pass. Out of the blue I receive a breathless email from Constable informing me that Cross Bones's owner, Transport for London (TfL), has made good on its intention to relocate the gates further up the road. They now sit a few yards away, overlooking the memorial garden cultivated by friends of the site. Extraordinary pictures appear online, of the gates dangling in the maw of a mechanical grab, ribbons and offerings trembling in mid-air. "It felt like our hearts hanging there," says Constable, who, with his partner Katy, witnessed the whole operation. However, he is delighted with their new position.

Alarming as it may have been, the relocation represents a quantum leap in efforts to preserve the site. In recent years, TfL had hinted that they were trying to prove that it never was a single women's burial ground – but how does one disprove a legend? TfL later asserted that the gates could be removed altogether. However, the respectful moving of the gates shows an awareness of the site's identity as a community space. Tfl has now accepted that it should be protected and looks likely to sign a lease with Bankside Open Spaces Trust, which will eventually lead to public access and community gardening. This newfound reluctance towards harming the Cross Bones memorial is all the more surprising in a part of London saturated with developers and international finance. Has the effervescent Constable injected a little – just a little – "magical thinking" into the men in suits? Perhaps coolly calculated PR judgment is the more likely explanation, but one fact remains striking. The prostitutes and paupers of Cross Bones enjoy a memorial more uniquely decorative, lavished with care and alive with symbol and devotion than even the bishops of their day. One can almost hear the Goose cackle. FT

The Cross Bones vigils take place at 7pm on the 23rd of every month, at the graveyard gates in Redcross Way, London SE1. More information on the site, the vigils and John Constable can be found at www.crossbones.org.uk/

BOTH PHOTOS: KATY KAOS

ABOVE: The Cross Bones gates dangle in the air as they are moved to a new position by Transport for London in the summer of 2014: "It felt like our hearts hanging there," said John Constable.

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FAYE LIPSON is a journalist and poet with a penchant for ghosts and the macabre. She edits news and politics site claritynews.co.uk. This is her first article for FT.

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GNOMES

THE SECRET WORLD OF RIEN POORTVLIET

Ever since Christmas 1976, people have been unwrapping a book called *Gnomes* and discovering its magical yet grounded world. ANGELINE B ADAMS and REMCO VAN STRATEN uncover the origins of an unlikely Dutch bestseller that became a worldwide sensation.

They were banned from the Chelsea Flower Show since its inception a century ago, but in the face of changing times and tastes were finally allowed to make an appearance in 2013. They are those ubiquitous, folksy nature lovers – garden gnomes.

One type of gnome is seen more often than any other, and anyone will recognise him: red pointy hat, white beard, blue workman's shirt, brown trousers and wellies. Earlier gnomes tended to favour the dwarfs from Disney's *Snow White* or the older, wizened models with their miner's caps and tights. Now, the image of the red-hatted gnome is so prevalent that it's hard to believe gnomes ever looked any different.

This gnome's success has been so phenomenal as to overshadow his origins. They lie not, as might be expected, in fairytale or fantasy, but in nature itself. His Dutch creators, Rien Poortvliet and Wil Huygen, were hunting buddies, and had each contributed to the house organ of KNJV, the Dutch organisation for shooting and conservation, before they began working together. They complemented one another perfectly: the writer Huygen was self-effacing and inclined to take a back seat, leaving the more extroverted artist Poortvliet as the recognisable, and sometimes controversial, public face of gnomedom.

Their book *Gnomes* took the world by storm from its publication in 1976, selling more than 2.5 million copies in a score of languages, generating sequels, cartoons, toys and other merchandising.

Ancestors of the Gnomes

Gnomes wasn't created in a vacuum, as there was already a healthy tradition of these little people appearing in the Dutch media, notably in children's book series like *Pinkeltje* and *Wipneus & Pim*, and as commercial mascots who helped sell products such as coffee and gin. Jean Dulieu's *Paulus the Wood Gnome* was very successful, appearing daily in a newspaper strip, then on radio and television.

Further gnomes appeared in the work of the eccentric Godfried Bomans. As the first writer to regularly appear on Dutch television, he became a superstar and a role model for Poortvliet, who himself would become something of a TV personality. Bomans's *Pim, Frits en Ida* school reading books were illustrated by Poortvliet, prompting Bomans to heap praise on the then unknown jobbing artist, raising his profile and nudging him towards artistic independence. Bomans's most enduring book is *Eric in the Land of the Insects*, about a boy who shrinks to the size of an ant. He experiences the everyday world of his back garden from a whole new perspective – a trick Poortvliet and Huygen would gratefully employ some years later.

RED POINTY HAT, WHITE BEARD, BLUE WORKMAN'S SHIRT, BROWN TROUSERS AND WELLIES...

FOREST GNOME
275 years of age
in the prime of life
true height – (without cap)
15 cm.
tool bag attached to belt
feet are slightly turned inward for fast running over grass, dry leaves, etc.

The gnome Piggelmee helped sell a Dutch coffee brand through a series of children's books, whose illustrations came free with each pound of coffee. Kabouter Jenever, gnome gin, was brewed in the town of Schiedam when Poortvliet was growing up there in the 1940s, and he would have seen the ads and books designed by Marten Toonder, still one of the country's most beloved artists. The beverage is now forgotten, but its slogan lived on: "Louter kabouter" – "pure gnome" – became the rallying cry of Amsterdam's nascent environmental movement of the early 1970s.

The long-haired Kabouters who gathered around activist Roel van Duyn wanted fewer cars in a greener Amsterdam, so they planted trees and set up a bike-borrowing scheme; reality triumphed over idealism, and most of the bikes ended up in the canals. Poortvliet and Huygen, firmly entrenched in the pastoral 1950s, no doubt cast a weary eye on those city shenanigans from their hunting lodge – but what started as jokes about these do-gooders soon turned into plans to get involved with the gnomes themselves.

Birth of the Gnomes

At first, not everyone was convinced. Poortvliet's son Tok remembers: "My father

got the idea to make a book about gnomes and wanted the opinion of my brother and myself. We thought it was a bad idea! But we were about 13 and 15 years old, and when your father then wants to make a childish book…" Luckily, Poortvliet and Huygen pushed on, and while the resulting book was not at all infantile, they preserved the original atmosphere in which it was created: "Often Uncle Wil, as I called him, came to our house with new texts and together they had much fun in thinking it up. They always kept in mind that it should be a book with a wink in its eye; they never imagined it would become such a success, or that so many would take it so seriously!"

Gnomes (*Life and Work of the Gnome* in Dutch) took the form of a naturalist's field diary. It was an integrated work, with text and drawings expressing their shared world view and values, as embodied in the gnome protagonist: reverence for nature, tempered by practicality, the moral didacticism of Poortvliet going hand in hand with what he called the "medical compassion" of Huygen. "I had the whole plan already in my head. It was my child," said Poortvliet, "but I saw in time that it would be an enrichment if Wil would do the text." And Huygen knew his place: "Because of Rien's wonderful illustrations the book became a success."

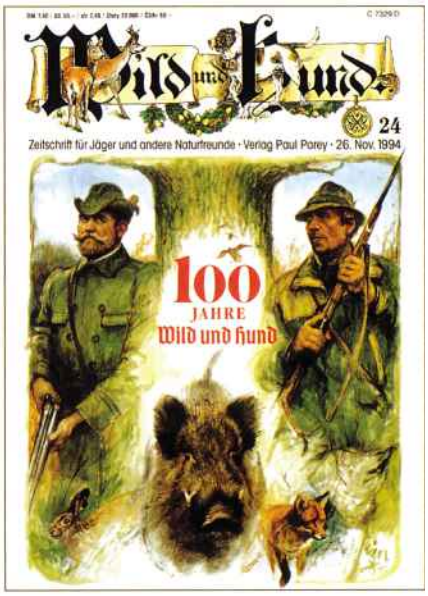
The book will be forever associated with the archetypal front and back views of its squinting gnome, but what elevates it above a joke is the holistic approach to gnome life – from the pseudo-historical background, to the typology of the different gnomes and other twilight beings, through the information on the gnomes' physiology, herbal remedies and animal first aid. All this is brought to life in Poortvliet's lush watercolours and typically droll handwritten asides, while the appended Legends of the Gnomes, the fables written by Huygen, give the book a heart and moral core.

At the book's end, the authors portray themselves as happy with the finished work – then, in a masterly narrative stroke, have the gnome Tomte appear to deflate their egos. "I had hoped for more," he reveals as he leafs through the book, dismissing it as cute but superficial. Alongside the authors, the reader is forced to face the real chasm between ourselves and the gnomes, whose instincts are balanced with intellect, whose relationship with nature is one of harmony, not abuse: themes which Poortvliet and Huygen would revisit, on a bigger scale, in *Secrets of the Gnomes*.

Fathers of the Gnomes

Poortvliet fell in love with country life and nature as an 11-year-old boy in 1943, when he was evacuated to his uncle's home on the southern Dutch island of Goerree-Overflakkee. In 1975, he used his time there as the jumping off point for his *Farm Book*, in which he chronicled the then rapidly disappearing farming community. In further books he would return to the history of his people, painting not the lives of the grand and mighty, but those of the overlooked commoners, turning a critical but affectionate eye on people and their foibles.

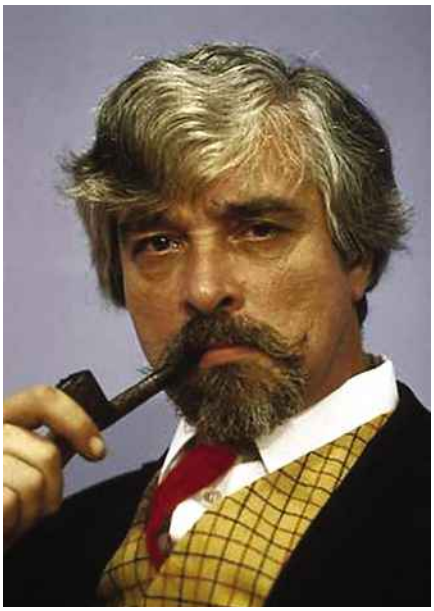
ABOVE: A beautifully observed Portvliet study of a rabbit and a gnome. **BELOW:** Such close observation of the natural world arose from the authors' immersion in rural life, including the traditions of the hunt.

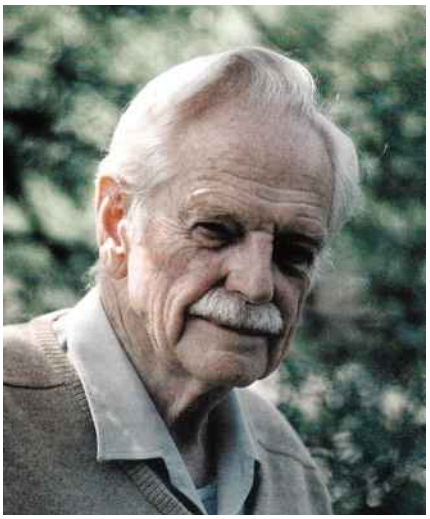


"My family thought that artists were a little bit dangerous," he liked to say to explain his lack of formal training. "All those naked women, the all-night drinking binges." But his talent did not go unnoticed and he soon made a name for himself in advertising. He came to hate the work, although the commercial experience would serve him well. He signed his work simply "Rien", underscored with an asterisk, his personal logo – and above all, the books are about Poortvliet himself, whether he writes and draws about history, religion or the hunt.

When he began to appear on Dutch television in talk shows and panels he became a sort of mascot for his own creations – a hobbit-like figure with up-curled moustache, pipe and waistcoat, extolling unabashed traditional values, quoting from the Bible in archaic Dutch and acting as an ambassador for the traditional hunt.

As a keen hunter and churchgoer Poortvliet saw himself as part of God's creation and as its steward. To him, this meant the need for selective and respectful hunting, after which the meat could be eaten with pleasure. He pointed out the duplicity in his critics' own behaviour, but to many it was inconceivable that someone who made such lovely portraits of animals could kill in cold





LEFT: The authors, as pictured by Poortvliet with Tomte the gnome, who was somewhat critical of their literary endeavours. **TOP:** The flamboyantly attired Rien Poortvliet was a popular Dutch personality. **ABOVE:** The modest and unassuming Wil Huygen.

blood. In later years, he refused to be drawn on the subject: "You would need at least two pages to print my arguments," he warned one journalist: "Don't try to parse it in one paragraph, because it won't work."

Poortvliet allowed himself to "float on the waves of popularity", but his vanity was tempered with self-deprecation and the feeling that he'd earned his success, despite the slights of "the official Amsterdam art gang". He was a personal friend of the Dutch royal family and gained access to the courts of Europe, but didn't boast about it. If he hadn't sketched the Queen with her contraption for scraping mud from the soles of her wellies, we'd never have known he had been a guest at Sandringham.

"You are doing me such a favour, to make such a compliment to my friend," was Poortvliet's reaction when his collaborator was praised. Wil Huygen merely cast his eyes down modestly. He is now largely forgotten, but this GP from Nijmegen was once one of the country's best children's authors. He bridged the contradiction between curing

POORTVLIET WAS A GUEST AT SANDRINGHAM, AND SKETCHED THE QUEEN

people and killing animals with a candid approach and a dry wit, and with this added to the understanding of hunting. His slice-of-life stories regularly appeared in the KNJV magazine *De Nederlandse Jager*, of which he was an editor, and were collected in book form with illustrations by Poortvliet. When he began to make a name for himself, Poortvliet got equal billing on their next collaborations – scrapbook-like volumes with cartoons, short stories and other snippets on hunting.

Huygen brought a wealth of medical knowledge to the *Gnomes* project, not confined to that of the average GP, but including acupuncture, herbalism and psychology. Huygen's contribution really comes to the fore in *Secrets of the Gnomes*, a sequel in which the gnomes' world gets expanded and its creators get shrunk and sent on a self-referential adventure in their own book.

Huygen echoes Jung in the tutelage of the Sandman on "the unknown dangerous world where past, present and future are entangled and anything is possible". He explains the appeal of fairy tales and fantasy creatures, and indeed those found in the book itself: "In your heart things are living realities, so you have no difficulty in placing them outside yourself in any landscape or surrounding. In short, you see what you want to see." And so, Little Red Riding Hood was a gnome woman, swallowed by a rabid wolf, while Punch and Judy are modelled on performing gnomes seen at fairs and markets.

If this expansion is bold and inventive,

Secrets also loses something in the process: a section on international gnomes undermines the carefully wrought cosmology of the infinitely older and wiser Gnome culture. Corny jokes, like the Papuan Gnome with his penis sheath and the Scottish one in his kilt, hint at boredom and self-indulgence, as does the overly cute Yeti with his bobble-hat haircut.

The timeless spell of the book is deliberately disrupted when authors and reader are charged with disarming the Dragon of Pollution. "Call a halt to this dragon, drive him back, destroy him, or your children's children will have no future." It's a moral sledgehammer of an ending, and the illustration is designed to provoke a rude awakening in the reader: the beast rises from a landfill, clutching shiny household appliances.

In the summer of 1988 the Spanish animation producer Claudio Biern Boyd, a dozen businessmen and Dutch broadcasters gathered to celebrate the launch of the *David the Gnome* cartoons and spin-off merchandise. The party was hosted by merchandising specialist Hans Kortekaas, making clear what really was at stake in bringing the adventures of David, his wife Lisa and the fox Swift to viewers worldwide. "Manufacturers were queueing up for me," he said about the then relatively new concept of mass-market character merchandising. "It's a character with a heart, which goes down well." Wil Huygen also attended the party, saying that: "I indeed hope that he succeeds in letting the gnome keep some of his dignity."

Merchandising deals had been set up a year earlier, and the resulting panoply of products gave the children plenty to spend their pocket money on: collectable figurines, plush toys, board books, puzzles, cutlery and even chewing gum were but a handful of the spin-offs of the 26-episode series. Poortvliet and Huygen claimed never to have earned a penny from all this. Not that they really needed it; the success of *Gnomes* had allowed Huygen to give up his practice, while Poortvliet purchased a country home with stables and 8.5 acres of forest and meadow.

Poortvliet in particular soured on the gnomes, and all the tat produced around *David* must have felt like a particular betrayal, as they had envisioned a more idealistic project, fostering environmental awareness in children. Still, the phenomenon gave their next book a huge lift.

Legacy of the gnomes

The Book of the Sandman and the Alphabet of the Sleep appeared in 1989 with a new publisher, with whom Poortvliet felt more at home as "they at least still pray before dinner." The book begins with an A-Z of sleeping habits, illustrated with anthropomorphised animals.

The authors present this as based on manuscript written by one Johann Poberschnigg and found by Poortvliet and Huygen in a hunting cabin in Germany during one of their hikes. They succeeded well enough in their conceit to have the German publisher ask for "the original text" when preparing the German edition. Earlier, the

LEFT: A previously unpublished sketch by Poortvliet, courtesy of his son Tok.

authors had already raised their eyebrows when *Gnomes* was classified as non-fiction in America.

The bulk of the relatively slight *Sandman* book is given over to the natural history and adventures of the Sandman as he dispenses sleep sand to humans and animals. The change of publishers might explain this Sandman not being the same as that seen in *Secrets of the Gnomes*, and the book is clearly marketed to the younger audience of *David the Gnome*. It appears the authors didn't have their hearts in it and instead created a pastiche of their own earlier work, including a return to well-worn themes: "In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if it was the Keep-awakes who invented television, radioactivity, and pollution".

Even slighter, at just 32 pages, is *Gnome Life*, which in 2010 appeared in the Netherlands as the official "completion of the *Gnomes* trilogy". It was published posthumously, as Huygen only translated the original English text into Dutch shortly before his death in 2009, while Rien Poortvliet had died from cancer in 1995. *Journey to the Ice Age*, Poortvliet's last non-gnome book, can be seen as his magnum opus, with its condensed history of man's relationship to animals, but with *The Gnome Who Wouldn't Go On Holiday* he had the definitive word on his own character.

"A decent gnome does best to just stay busy with his work," the gnome grumbles. Like Poortvliet, a self-confessed craftsman, he works six days per week but leaves the seventh for the Good Lord. He doesn't take faraway, expensive holidays, because he has his own bit of paradise around him. As Poortvliet once said: "Why would I, living in such beautiful surroundings? I am a happy and thankful man." The gnomes in this book are more cartoonish than before and, with their human weaknesses, far removed from the wise, responsible creatures of decades before.

The legacy of Poortvliet and Huygen is, of course, much bigger than their Gnome books, the *David the Gnome* cartoons and the resulting landfill of merchandise. With the publication of *Gnomes* in the States in 1979, the format of the fantasy coffee-table book changed forever. When Ian Ballantine, of the New York publisher Abrams, picked up the book in a Dutch airport he fell in love with it and had it translated. It immediately sold a million copies and topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for months, making Ballantine eager for a follow-up. Though the resulting 1979 *Fairies* book follows the familiar template faithfully, Poortvliet and Huygen could not be pressed into service, and the job went to the young artists Brian Froud and Alan Lee. As Ballantine explained, it was only logical the book was made by Brits, as fairies are more at home in England, Scotland and Ireland.

Alan Lee would go on to become the foremost Tolkien illustrator, while Brian Froud designed the creatures for Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal*, but mainly produced (semi-)sequels to *Fairies*. Pseudo-science, scribbled notes and watercolour illustrations have become the standard formula for giving a sheen of credibility to fairytale creatures, as parodies and pastiches appear with subjects like goblins, giants, dragons and leprechauns.

Poortvliet's gnome has become a piece of pop art, instantly recognisable, often parodied and referenced, as in the peaceful garden gnomes turned zombie made by Dutch artist Maaike de Vos ("The garbage monster especially impressed me, and fed my environmental awareness"). Like many who grew up with the *Gnomes* books, she has now passed them on to her own daughter. The lessons contained in them remain relevant for a new generation: fairytales are never just fairytales, and as the story reflects and illuminates the teller, it can teach us much about where we stand in relation to the world around us. FT

The authors would like to thank: Tok Poortvliet, Kees van Straten, Tjeerd Doornbos and Jeske Decock.

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ANGELINE B ADAMS & REMCO VAN STRATEN live and work in Belfast, where their lives are ruled by an Alien Burmese Cat. They have previously written for FT on Robert E Howard and Sinterklaas.

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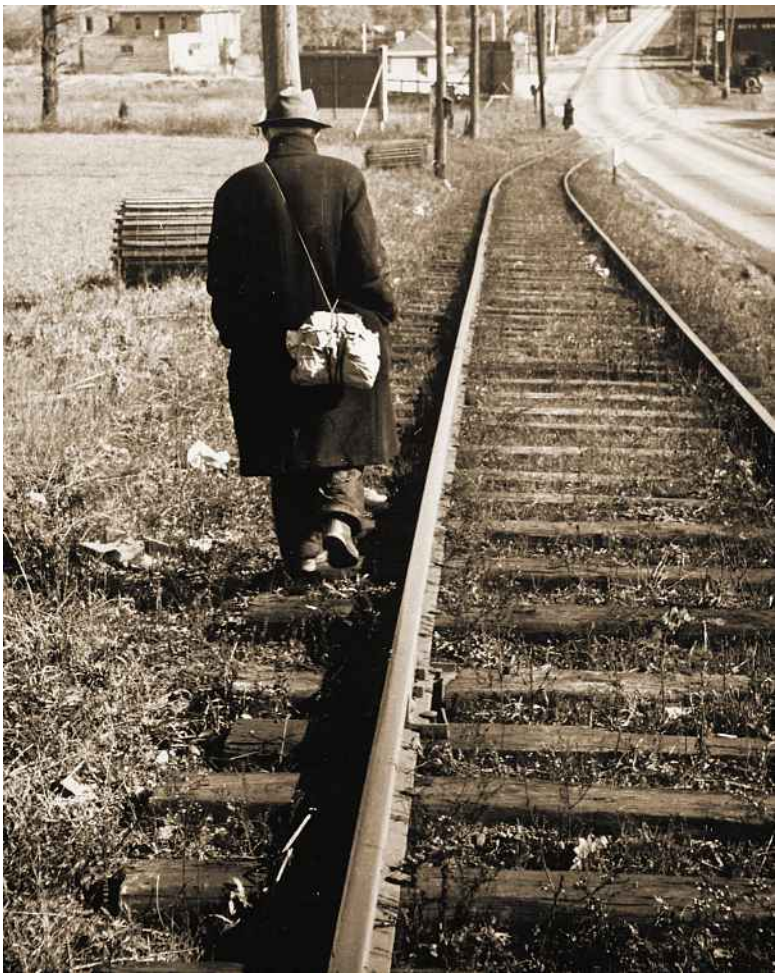
SANTA CLAUS SMITH

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a mysterious hobo travelled the length and breadth of the USA writing cheques for improbably large amounts of money to strangers who showed him kindness. **MIKE DASH** shares a heart-warmingly odd story straight out of a Frank Capra film



THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

On the evening of 18 July 1935, in an America still crushed in the coils of the Great Depression, an old man with a long white beard appeared on the front lawn of a farm off Route 1 in Metamora, Indiana.

It was late, nearly dusk, and when the farmer's wife came out to ask what the man wanted, he begged her for a piece of bread. "He had a very kind face," she wrote some days later, "and it has always been my custom to give to tramps if I have anything I can handy give. He was carrying a pack on his back so I told him to set it down on the lawn. I had a nice warm supper cooked so I served him on the lawn. He seemed to be very hungry. I gave him a second serving. When he finished he took from his pack two checks copied from brown paper, looked like they were cut from paper bags. He came forward and handed these to me with his plate."

According to this woman, "his face was so kind it is hard to believe he meant anything false." But when she looked down at the paper cheques, she saw that one had been written for $25,000, and the other for $1,000.

More than a year later, on 23 October 1936, the same old man wandered into a lunchroom on a highway outside Columbus, Texas. He told the waitress he had no money but asked her for a cup of coffee. Feeling sorry for him, she took him into the kitchen and fed him a bowl of stew and a jellyroll with his coffee. The old man ate his fill and, while the waitress was serving other customers, took another piece of paper from his pack, scribbled on it in indelible pencil, and slipped it beneath his coffee cup before taking up his pack and hurrying off into the night. The waitress returned to find that the slip of paper was a blank cheque for $27,000, written on the Irving National Bank of New York and signed "John S Smith of Riga, Latvia, Europe." On the back he had scribbled the words: "Fill your name in, send to bank."

Four days after that, John S Smith was in Yuma, Arizona, where he left a cheque for $2,000 in exchange for a cup of coffee. Early in November, in Indianola, Mississippi, he handed another farmer's wife two cheques totalling $26,000. And in December, in Fort Worth, Texas, a young woman sitting in a parked car was approached by an elderly, bearded man who begged her for a nickel. She gave him a dime, prompting him to use her fender as a desk and write a cheque for $950. When the girl laughed and thanked him, he took the check back, tore it up, and wrote out another one for $26,000." That's for your sweet smile," he said.

In all, between 1934 and 1940, the mysterious John S Smith travelled as far north as Clinton, Connecticut, and as far west as Los Angeles, scattering pencil-and-paper cheques written on the Irving National for sums totalling several million dollars. He paid as little as $90 for what a minister's wife in Terre Haute, Indiana, insisted was "a good, hot lunch," and as much as $600,000 for a hamburger cooked for him by a waitress in New Iberia, Louisiana. He paid more for food than he did for the rides he sometimes hitched, and more to women than to men. He also showed an affinity for cats, leaving cheques totalling $5,000 to a woman in South Dakota to pay for "upkeep the black and white cat name Smiles." All his cheques were written on brown paper, often spotted with grease, and they shared several other distinctive characteristics: handwriting in a vaguely gothic style, the misspelling of "thousand" as "tousand" and the crude symbol of a smiley face, with pencil dots for eyes and nose.

Eccentric though he clearly was, John S Smith was only one of the hundreds of thousands of men who took to the roads and rails of the United States between the coming of railways and the 1930s, an era when – for all its harshness and

its frequent tragedy – the travelling life was regarded by many romantic young men as the ultimate test of manhood. Some travelled because they had to, because they were craftsmen who had grown up in towns too small to make full-time use of their services. Others were itinerants who met the need for seasonal labour on farms. And a smaller, but far from insignificant, number drifted because it suited them. "To those who idealised them, hoboes and tramps were the last of the rugged individualists," the writer Richard Wormser notes. "But the reality of the hobo world was often far different. It was a life in which a man might go days without food, weeks without a decent place to sleep, and months without clothing… Jack London, who chose tramp life as a teenager, saw it for what it was: 'I was in the pit, the abyss, the human cesspool, the schools and charnel house of our civilisation. This is the part that society chooses to ignore.'"

What drove John S Smith onto the roads is harder to know. He confided to a woman in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, that he had left home in 1934 because the Depression had "got on his mind"; she suspected, rather, that he had "got loose from an institution and has been lost ever since." The most romantic depiction of the tramp can be found in a letter written by a young woman from San Antonio, who received a cheque for $6,000 from him. "He stated that he purposely wore ragged clothes and rewarded those who helped him," she recorded.

That letter, and others like it, found its way into the files of the Irving Trust – a New York institution based at 1 Wall Street, the successor of the defunct Irving National Bank and the unwilling recipient for reams of correspondence that flowed in from people who encountered John S Smith. Most of the letters were accompanied by Smith's grease-stained slips of rough brown paper. They inquired whether the cheques could be cashed, and adopted a variety of tones: some suspicious, some disbelieving, not a few filled with hope. "I received these checks from an old gentleman who ate breakfast at our home," a Texas farmer wrote in December 1937. "I asked the bank here to handle same for me, and they seemed to think they were no good. This man had no reason to give us these checks knowing they were no good. So I still believe he wanted us to have this amount of money and we sure need it. Wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

HE LEFT $5,000 FOR "UPKEEP THE BLACK AND WHITE CAT NAME SMILES"

According to the great *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell, who was given access to the tramp's odd file in 1940 in exchange for his promise not to name any of the hopeful letter-writers, the clerks at the Irving Trust devoted considerable effort to solving the many mysteries John S Smith created. First they puzzled over the problem that the Irving National Bank had gone out of existence in 1923, 11 years before the first cheques drawn on it were written; did this mean the old tramp had long ago kept an account there? They searched their records, together with those of the old Irving National, for any that might have belonged to a man who had been born in Riga, Latvia, Europe. None could be found under any name at any date. Next, believing that Smith might once have worked in their building as a janitor or guard, they scoured their employment rolls. Again, they found no trace of any John S Smith.

In the end, Mitchell noted, the Trust officials concluded that Smith was "a simple-minded, goodhearted old man who feels that he should reward those treating him with kindness." They made no attempt to trace him or have him arrested, since there was no evidence of forgery or fraud, and he seemed never to attempt to cash a cheque or actually buy anything with one. "The bank people call him Santa Claus Smith and wish that he had millions of dollars on deposit," Mitchell added, and he noted that, from time to time, a bank official would pull the Smith file and amuse himself by tracing the tramp's peregrinations on a map.

For a short time, it seemed the mystery might be solved. A letter written by John S Smith, postmarked Wabash, Indiana, and (Mitchell observed) "scribbled wildly on the back of seven lunchroom menus" was delivered to the bank. Sadly, while it began, "Irv. Nat. Bank of N.Y. Dear Sir," it then became illegible. The letter had apparently been kept in the tramp's pockets for a while and become stained with grease and tobacco crumbs. After that it appeared to have been dipped in water, reducing Smith's scribbles to nothing more than purple blots. Still, one of the bank officials fetched a magnifying glass, and – "after a considerable amount of agonizing labour," Mitchell wrote – made out a handful of phrases. These were: "listen those three waitress," "put something in that bank," "in USA for 26yrs 30yrs 22," "mortgage and now," "to see about cats," "waitress girl in that place in Ohio," and "all over USA".

Attached to the letter were two of Smith's cheques. One was for $15,000 and the other for $6,000. Both were written on the Irving National Bank, and both were made payable to the Irving National Bank. Somehow, it seemed a fitting end to the tale of one old tramp's perpetual circuit of the country. FT

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MIKE DASH was FT's publisher for some years, as well as a regular contributor, and is the acclaimed author of the books *Tulipomania*, *Batavia's Graveyard*, *Thug*, *Satan's Circus* and *The First Family*.

The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 58: ABDUCTION BY ALIENS PART 3

At the 55th New Jersey UFO conference, held in Hamilton, NJ, on 12 April 2014, film-maker James Carman treated those attending to clips from a documentary-in-progress. One of the more enlightening of these showed Al Bielek – *soi-disant* survivor of the Philadelphia Experiment – talking with abductee Gloria Hawker. Bielek had been translated from 1943 to 2137: to a world where, thanks to global warming, sea-levels had risen so far that both the eastern and western seaboards of the US, as we know them, had disappeared. One wonders how it was that Bielek ended up on dry land and not in the sea above drowned Philadelphia, and even more, just how he made his way back to our corner of the time-space continuum. Gloria Hawker had been forcibly impregnated by a reptilian alien. This is mad enough stuff for those of us who had some respect for Allen Hynek, but not that *outré* for a contemporary ufological conference, it seems. Carman's clips included one of 'alternative historian' Michael Tsarion, who "swiftly weaved together such topics as the royal Tudor family, stargates, Nephilim, HAARP, Roswell, Lemurians, the Immaculate Conception, and genetic engineering. It was," wrote online reporter SooziQ, to no one's surprise, "a difficult interview to follow." She also (one hopes accurately) quoted Tsarion as saying "Unicorns and minotaurs made the perfect servants." Who could think of anyone better than a gentle unicorn to squeeze one's toothpaste on the brush last thing at night?

Not long after, on 31 May 2014, in Hastings, Sussex, an organisation called Anomalous Mind Management Abductee Contactee Helpline (AMMACH) held its own conference. One speaker – and not an atypical one – Samantha Macdonald, talked of "her personal experiences with UFOs, ETs, Dark Magic, Orgonite, and the whole Cosmic Matrix Agenda." The conference blurb tells us: "It took Samantha a long time to speak openly about her experiences, for safety reasons, as she has witnessed first hand what it means to become a target because of one's abilities and experiences… Samantha shares not only her experiences, but the positive message she feels comes with the overall understanding of the lessons this has brought her."

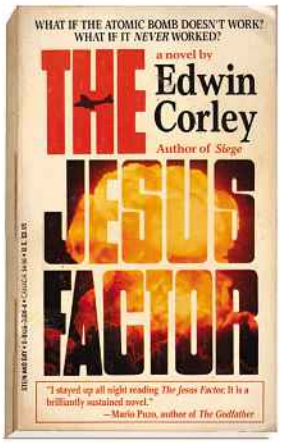
The previous year, the AMMACH conference had featured the splendidly named Chantelle Sabrina Pyper, whose "strong emotions… have an impact kinetically on electronics, electricity and things in general. Premonitions and telepathy are a part of her communication with the spirit world, and the ETs. She is also able to remote view certain situations, and has had interest from the military in terms of them letting her know; they are more interested in her abilities, than her ET experiences. She has had interactions with a number of different ETs, and angelic types [of] entities, from the tall greys, to the seven-ft tall orange morphing beings, that can also shapeshift to human form, along with the tall entities with a wide chest red eyes and horns, who also wear body armour, with a snake-like dinosaur face, as well as others."

There was a time when ufology considered itself to be, or at least *trying* to be, scientific – in pursuit of defensible conclusions derived from objective data. That may have been a mild delusion, but the kind of oxymoronic *mélange* of psychic powers, perky New Age buoyancy, conspiracy paranoia, abduction lore and junk history sampled here is no more objective than fortune-telling from tea leaves. So what is going on? How did things come to this?

LEFT: Chantelle Sabrina Pyper has had "interactions with a number of different ETs… from tall greys to the seven-ft tall orange morphing beings…"

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

Relativity is all, said Thomas Hardy somewhere. He wasn't thinking of Einsteinian physics but the need to comprehend any event or phenomenon from the totality of its context. If alien-abduction accounts are not literally true (and we've seen in these entries why they most probably are not), the notion itself, alone, had to come from somewhere. In other words, there is a fertile cultural framework, a loam of ideas and traditions, from which the green shoots of such an idea may spring, taking their specific morphology from their particular circumstances. Abduction lore is a modern mutation of a very ancient idea: that there is an Otherworld, distinct from but not necessarily very far from and perhaps overlapping with our own, and it is populated by capricious creatures who take a sometimes kind, sometimes mischievous, sometimes thoroughly malevolent interest in humanity. One of the abiding themes in this cluster of beliefs is that the Otherworldly creatures have a habit of kidnapping humans for one reason or another. They seem to have a peculiar, but not exclusive, interest in children, as allegedly do the alien Greys.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The parallel most often cited by sceptical ufologists in this context is Western fairy lore. Aliens are, according to ufology, not very far away, even though they originate from Other worlds – after all, they've been buzzing around our skies for decades at least, for centuries according to some, and may even be from 'parallel' universes. Like the Greys, the fairies are small (in modern tradition), frail, ambiguous and ambivalent, and reputed to be of a dying race: according to folklorist Dr Katherine Briggs, "perhaps the chief motive" for the fairies' capture of mortals was "to inject the dwindling stock with fresh blood and human vigour." Hybrids, anyone? While a few reports (notably that of Anne Jefferies, from 1645) from 'experiencers' of fairy abduction have quite specific parallels with alien abductions, this is not the thrust of the sceptics' argument. Nor do sceptics argue that there is a direct influence from fairy lore. The point is only that people seem to have a predisposition or affinity with the general theme of Otherworldly creatures' powers of enchantment, necrotic tendencies, and propensity to nab innocent citizens for nefarious purposes.

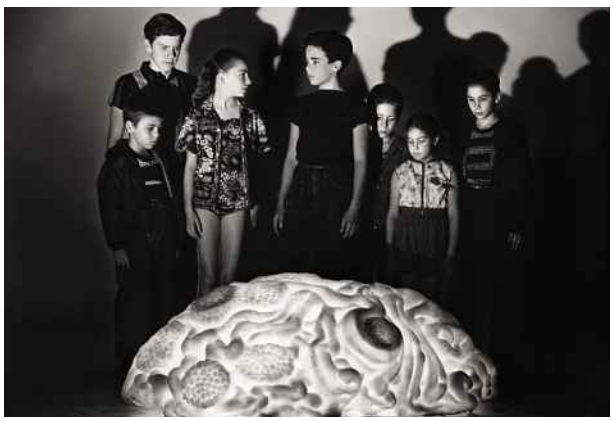
And it's not just fairies who are at it. Trolls, in Scandinavian folklore, likewise need to steal people to invigorate their bloodlines. Even humans, if sufficiently Other, do it: Gypsies, most notoriously, according to the folklore, are great thieves of children, while Jews have long been reputed to take Christian children for their blood. (Both these charm-free legends arose in Europe at about the same time in the 15th century.) A sexual variant of this expression of fear of Others manifested in the 'white slavery' panic of the late 19th and early 20th century, in which lovely young damsels (i.e. pale-skinned virgins) were supposedly being abducted by various shady, but always swarthy, types to be put to work in brothels or harems in exotic climes. The alien abduction syndrome is an updating of this theme, garbed for an era much possessed by the idea – if not the practice – of space travel and intrigued by the possibility of intelligent life on other planets. And it's hard to surpass an ET for Otherness, even without taking magic technology into account.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Alien abduction accounts, then, belong to a general strand of folklore – and, to some extent, the 18th-19th-century literary tradition of captivity narratives: those whose upshot is spiritual redemption are today paralleled by those abductees who claim 'positive' changes of lifestyle or spiritual outlook in the aftermath of their experiences. But these habits of thought won't account for specific details given by abductees. For those, we need to turn to more immediate cultural sources.

For example… One of the most bizarre abduction tales is the Dapple Gray Lane case of 1971, which began when two friends, John Hodges and Pete Rodriguez, were confronted by a one-eyed brain-like blob in the early hours of one August morning. They were hypnotically regressed in 1976 and 1978 respectively. That something weird (or weird to them) was in the road, we needn't question. Martin Kottmeyer's unpublished notes on the case observe that when asked to draw the 'brain', Hodges produced an image remarkably like the alien brain featured in the 1958 movie *The Space Children*. Rodriguez's sketch, on the other hand, bears a definite resemblance to another detached alien brain – the one on Uranus in 1961's *Journey to the 7th Planet*. In addition, Hodges was given a long lecture by his abductors about the horrors of nuclear weapons (a theme of *Space Children*). He was also informed that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not destroyed by atom bombs, but earthquakes, because such bombs, airborne, didn't work. This is the subject of Edwin Corley's 1972 novel *The Jesus Factor*, which Hodges had read by the time of his regression. One might reasonably surmise that the friends had projected cultural material on to whatever oddity was in the road – and as not everyone sees all the same movies, their imagery was subtly different – and regurgitated it under hypnosis. 'Nuclear fear' is a common trope in alien encounters as well as science fiction, but atom bombs going dud when dropped from aircraft is quirky as well as plain wrong, and the source unmistakable. So one of the more boggling abduction cases in the record is reduced to the fictional skeleton of two B-movies (themselves part of an SF sub-genre about disembodied alien brains) and an eccentric novel.

Possibly the most notorious (or controversial, if you like) instance of unconscious cultural borrowing is the famous wrap-around eyes of the aliens encountered by Barney Hill. Barney first described and drew the aliens' wraparound eyes during a hypnosis



ABOVE: *Journey to the 7th Planet* (1961) and *The Space Children* (1958) both feature alien 'brains' similar to that reported in the Dapple Gray Lane case.

session with Dr Simon on 22 February 1964. 'The Bellero Shield', an episode of the science-fiction series *The Outer Limits*, was first broadcast on 10 February 1964, and featured aliens with wraparound eyes. This, says Martin Kottmeyer, appears to be the only instance of spacemen with anything approaching the Greys' weird eyes in science fiction up to that date.

Not only that: in the same hypnosis session, Kottmeyer observes, Barney Hill mentions a truly bizarre aspect of 'his' aliens: "They won't talk to me. Only the eyes are talking to me. I – I – I – I don't understand that. Oh – the eyes don't have a body. They're just eyes… The eyes are telling me, 'Don't be afraid'… All I see are these eyes." In 'The Bellero Shield', one of the fictional aliens explains: "I cannot read your mind. I cannot even understand your language. I analyse your eyes. In all the universes, all who have eyes, have eyes that speak…"

ABOVE: An alien from 'The Bellero Shield', a 1964 episode of science fiction series *The Outer Limits*.

Asked about this correspondence in 1997, Betty Hill said she had "never heard of" *The Outer Limits*, that she and Barney were hardly ever at home nights to watch TV, and that a science-fiction programme wouldn't have interested them anyway. But Barney could easily have picked up a detail as striking as the new-fangled alien wraparound-eyes-that-spoke from a trailer for the episode (it was billed as having echoes of *Macbeth*: not bad fare for intellectuals like the Hills) or in talking to friends or colleagues who had seen it. Already months into recalling his abduction with Dr Simon, Barney would scarcely have found the subject tedious. The links are too specific to be mere coincidence.

The Hill case was seminal in abduction lore, but not because it was the first abduction on record – it was simply the most widely publicised, and so became (as previously noted) the template for abduction accounts that followed. Thus details in abduction cases grow by internal – some might say incestuous – accretion: that is, through one account borrowing from another within the bubble of ufology as well as from popular culture and other sources. It's been insufficiently noticed that Betty Hill herself did this, even while basing her account on a series of dreams that, as the original case investigator Walter N Webb remarked, could be viewed as an attempt to answer the question "What might happen if… [one were abducted by aliens]?" Peter Rogerson (*Magonia* 47) has noted these two passages describing aliens, one of them Betty Hill's:

> *…their complexions were of a grey tone, like grey paint with a black base, their lips were of a bluish tint… Hair and eyebrows were very dark, possibly black. The men were all dressed alike… [in] a light blue navy colour with a grey shade in it. They wore trousers and short jackets, that gave the impression of zippered sports jackets but I am not aware of any zippers or buttons. Shoes were the low, slip-on style resembling a boot. They were all wearing military caps similar to the Air Force, but not so broad on top.*

> *…they all seemed to be wearing some sort of uniform unfamiliar to me. All but two or three of them wore black-billed caps with a black band around the bottom… bare headed one's hair was black and crewcut. [They] wore jackets like cowboys and trousers of a material which reflected a bluish-grey cast under the bright moonlight. Their dark olive hued faces were bland and without lines or blemishes and their skin was taut and hard over the bone structure.*

Rogerson comments: "The second description was from [contactee] Truman Bethurum's *Aboard a Flying Saucer* [1954] and the similarities are such as to make it near certain that Betty must have read it. No doubt she consciously dismissed it as nonsense but the influence on her dream is clear."

ONWARD AND UPWARD

It's somewhat ironic that the 'first' abductee should have been influenced by the 'second' contactee. We've noted before in these entries that 'serious ufologists', and most especially abductologists, regard any linkage of the two as anathema, abductees being purveyors of stark-naked reality and contactees being conmen. It's open to doubt as to whether this distinction was as clearly perceived, or as assiduously maintained, by abductees themselves. As the likes of AMMACH illustrate, there is in any case now scarcely a line between the two, and all manner of New Age flummery and pseudoscience has barnacled itself onto experiencers' discourse. How so?

It's probably the legacy of one man: Harvard psychiatrist Dr John Mack. His interest in abductions was filtered through a predisposition to doubt the comprehensive authority of science for all aspects of life (not in itself a wicked thought, and one shared by most scientists). It seems, though, that as Mack came more and more to regard 'his' abductees' stories as plausible, the more he regarded a scientific approach to their accounts as a snare, and to believe that they had entered some species of 'other' – or perhaps additional – reality. (Interestingly, he was encouraged in this by philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn.) Tending to see abduction accounts as visionary experiences, he seems to have plumped for the notion that such visions are of a transcendent actuality, rather than mental phenomena. Ultimately, the truth of that notion is undecided, but Mack's inclusive attitude was taken to be anti-scientific – it was certainly *un*scientific, not to say undisciplined – and so to his being embraced by the New Age, not least (in typical New-Age self-contradiction) because he was a pillar of the academic establishment.

It was the contradiction between Mack's professional standing and his apparent credulity that, a bit belatedly, awoke other psychologists to abduction accounts and piqued their interest in what lay behind them. Chief among them was Professor Richard McNally, also of Harvard, who concluded after due research that sleep paralysis was at the heart of abduction stories: a not entirely inaccurate conclusion, even if it doesn't account for the whole phenomenon. Nonetheless McNally noticed a truth observed before him by sceptical ufologists: as he told BBC Radio 4 ('Alien Abductions', broadcast 8 June 2005), abductees may be offered an alternative interpretation of their experiences, but "they are reluctant to accept it... there is a spiritual payout ultimately for these folks that makes them reluctant to accept an alternative. That's the same with John Mack. He was a very spiritual type of guy. When I asked him if he really believed that people could be spirited through walls he said to me, 'Well you know Rich. You are trapped in a Western scientific framework. If you look at it within an Eastern perspective where there are multiple levels of consciousness...' [Then] he turned on the fog machine, and I had no idea what he was talking about after that point."

Bafflegab is what the New Age specialises in: not only anti-scientific, its adherents are profoundly anti-intellectual. There have been many intelligent speculations over the years as to the deeper, non-literal, meaning of the abduction phenomenon in its broad outline. One need not quibble with them to see that there seems now to be a meta-significance to abductees' claims: they have become absorbed into a generalised, largely incoherent expression of pain and bewilderment at a world perceived as having gone profoundly wrong.

At present that expression seems to be a subterranean, sub-cultural rumbling, whose implicit politics are not pretty: will it turn into a howl? FT

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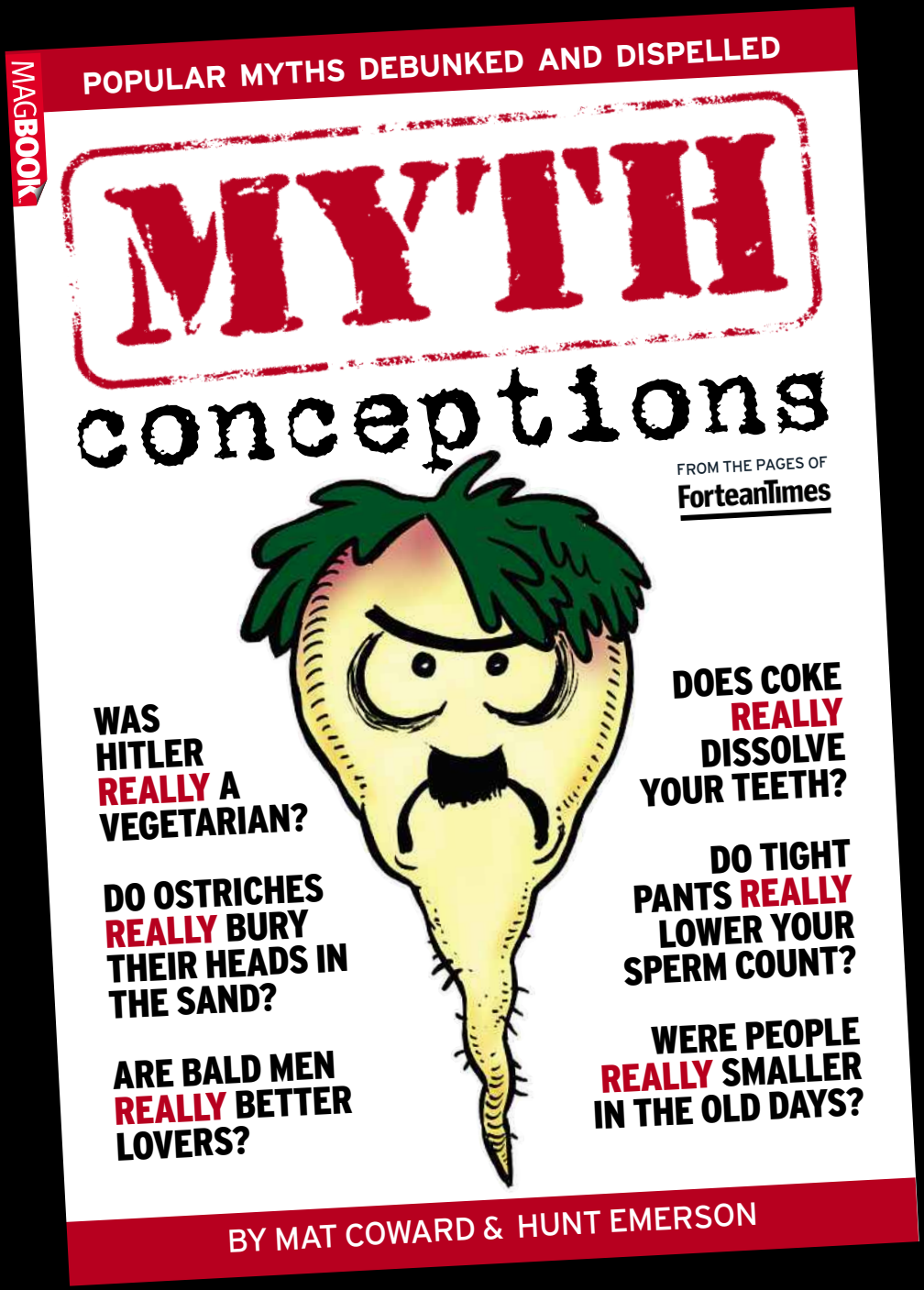
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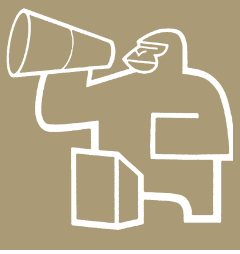


That tingly feeling...

IAN 'CAT' VINCENT chills out and explores the delightful and previously unnamed sensations of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response

IAN 'CAT' VINCENT is a lifelong student of the occult and a contributing editor at dailygrail.com. He lives in Yorkshire and blogs at catvincent.com and is on Twitter @catvincent.

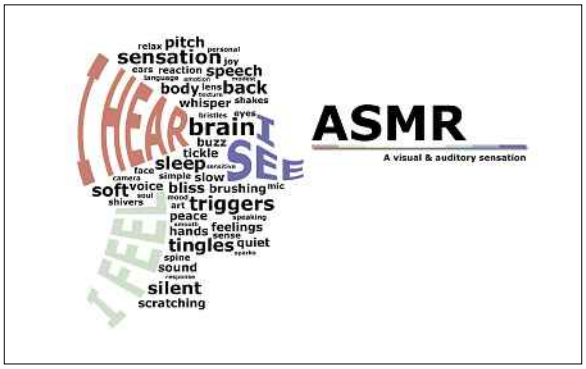
I first felt it as a child, and I had no idea what it was – or even if anyone else felt it. It felt like a rich, pervasive tingling feeling just under my skin, starting either at the nape of my neck or near the base of my spine... a rush of neural 'energy', sometimes triggered by great music or an emotionally significant scene in a movie; sometimes by something as simple as a breeze stirring the hair touching my neck. It both was and was not like getting cold chills or 'goosebumps'.

A nearly overwhelming sensation – and one that, in later years, would sometimes (but not always) appear during sexual situations – mostly connected to being delicately touched in sensitive but not directly erogenous areas, like the ears or the back. Sometimes, I found I could trigger this delightful experience almost at will, by mental focus combined with a twitching of certain pelvic muscles.

There was no name for it I could find, so I called the sensation "feelness".

It has a name now: Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR). And, it turns out, a *lot* of other people feel it too.

People have probably experienced this sensation far back in history, possibly for as long as humans have existed. It may be connected with some of the more passionate descriptions of everything from romantic love to mystical experience. The modern exploration of the sensation – what it is, who experiences it, how to induce it – began in 2008 with a Yahoo.com group called 'The Society Of Sensationalists' (https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sos_08/info). The Society was formed to try and find people who had experienced the sensation and provide a forum to discuss it, noting that "we need help, not in the sense that we want to solve or cure this sensation but rather instead to learn what causes this and whatever else may be concerning to us."



ABOVE: A typographical representation of ASMR.

LEFT: Bob Ross videos are an unlikely cult favourite in ASMR circles, apparently inducing the most excellent tingles...

Members shared their experiences and examples of what triggered the sensation. Common triggers included those I have mentioned, as well as certain softly whispered voices and, especially, a particularly focused *attention*. A variety of terms were suggested for it; Attention Induced Head Orgasm (AIHO), Attention Induced Euphoria (AIE) and similar.

This in turn led to a popular ongoing blog 'That Unnamed Feeling' (http://theunnam3df33ling.blogspot.co.uk/), founded by Andrew MacMuiris in 2008.

The term Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response itself was first coined by Jenn Allen, founder of the ASMR Research Organisation, in association with MacMuiris (asmr-research.org), a few years later, and has come to be the most commonly accepted term.

As she explained it in a Vice.com interview: "'Autonomous' refers to the 'individualistic nature of the triggers, and the capacity in many to facilitate or completely create the sensation at will'... 'Sensory' and 'response' are fairly obvious, and 'meridian' is a more polite term for 'orgasm'".

Allen and her associates strive to understand the phenomenon, both from a scientific perspective (seeking both interest and possible funding from the scientific community) and from discussions with those who experience it and have found ways to induce it in themselves and others.

A parallel concept to ASMR is that of *frisson*: the specific, similar sensation which occurs during particularly significant musical or audiovisual moments: the two are considered sufficiently different to be kept separate though some (such as myself) can often experience them together, or find that one leads to the other.

Though the ASMR sensation is a supremely sensual one (and, as Allen noted, somewhat orgasm-like, often leading to a kind of delicious neural crescendo; in fact, the second-most common term used is 'braingasm'), it does not seem to be directly analogous to the sexual response. But, as people who are more open to sexuality in general are quite often more accepting of a wider range of sensual experience, there has been a certain... overlap of interest in the area. A recent post by artist Grace Allison on the popular (and very much Not Safe For Work) *Oh Joy Sex Toy* website discusses the phenomenon in the form of a witty and informative comic strip, illustrating the similarities to, and differences from, sexual play (www.ohjoysextoy.com/asmr/).

There is also a growing range of performers who post YouTube videos which attempt, often quite successfully, to induce the state in their viewers. These performers – known as ASMRtists – are emphatically *not* producing pornography, unless your definition of such is rather more general than most. Performers whisper to the camera, sometimes scratching or tapping objects, turning the pages of a book or roleplaying triggering situations, such as doctor's examinations or giving haircuts.

As yet, though some scientists accept the existence of the phenomenon, there has been no formal research on the subject. But don't let that stop you from experimenting at home... FT

‘Skeptics’ and believing unbelievers

DAVID V BARRETT joins the True Believers of New Atheism to watch a new film paying tribute to the movement’s high priests and finds that this self-congratulatory puff piece reveals nothing but the coldness of closed minds.

DAVID V BARRETT is a regular contributor to FT and co-founder of the London Fortean Society. He has written widely on the sociology of religion.

At the end of October 2014, I was invited to a showing of *The Unbelievers*, a film following British biologist Prof Richard Dawkins and American physicist Prof Lawrence Krauss around various talks and TV appearances, and chatting to each other, in Britain, America and Australia. [1]

The film is a puff piece: a hagiography of the high priests of New Atheism. Over and again, we’re shown the concluding sentences of a Dawkins or Krauss talk, then rapturous applause from their audience. It’s full of unsupported assertions, but very little argument. There is no structure, no commentary, no balance, no critical stance, no science. The sound quality is all over the place, because it’s filmed in so many varied locations. As a film, whether seen as a documentary, an artwork or a pæan of praise, it’s a disjointed mess.

And the audience at Conway Hall, home of rationalism and atheism in London for 85 years, loved every moment of it. They laughed whenever Dawkins or Krauss made a joke at the expense of anyone stupid enough to believe in God; they cheered and applauded whenever they scored a straw man debating point; and when the film showed Christian or Muslim protesters telling Dawkins he’d go to Hell, they were an inch away from baying at them.

I wondered how they would have reacted if instead they had watched an hour-and-a-quarter of unconnected snippets of Billy Graham or Oral Roberts in their heyday, travelling around the world preaching their message.

I wondered if any of them saw the similarity.

Even in my long-ago Evangelical youth I would have questioned a Christian equivalent of this film – *The Believers*, let’s call it. I’d have asked what the point of it was; why it didn’t present any sort of coherent case; why it was so horribly bitty; why, at the beginning and end, there were five minutes of assorted comics and other celebrities stating their identical beliefs as facts; and perhaps most of all, who was the film aimed at?

ABOVE: Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss: rationality with a sneer on its face?

The film makes True Believers feel good about themselves

The last question is easy. It’s aimed at True Believers, to make them feel good about themselves. That’s what *The Unbelievers* is all about. I doubt if it will go on any sort of general release; it will be shown in places like Conway Hall to audiences who already fervently believe in its message.

This isn’t an article arguing for God or against atheism. It’s more about attitude and approach; and an understanding of science; and the difference between ‘skeptics’ and sceptics.

I’ve long distinguished between what might be called soft atheists, who don’t believe in God, and hard atheists who believe there is no God. They’re not the same thing; the former have an absence of belief; the latter have a belief system. The former are closer to agnosticism, literally “not-knowing”; the latter tend to be dogmatic about their beliefs.

The philosopher of science Karl Popper said in a 1969 interview: “I don’t know whether God exists or not... Some forms of atheism are arrogant and ignorant and should be rejected, but *agnosticism* – to admit that we don’t know and to search – is all right.” [2] This sums up admirably my problem with hard atheists, and with the attitude of Richard Dawkins and his followers.

First: the ignorant. Every movement has its leaders and its followers, and not all the followers have a complete grasp of the tenets of the movement. How many people who loosely call themselves Christians are able to discuss the complexities of the Trinity, or the God-man nature of Jesus, or the knotty issues of salvation through faith by grace? So it is with some who bear the label of skeptics or rationalists or humanists or atheists. More than once I’ve been told firmly and unequivocally, “Science has disproved God.” I’ve found that the best response is “Gosh, really? When did that happen?”

Such people have belief but little knowledge – and for self-declared rationalists, very little understanding of science, what it is and how it works. One reason why I stopped going to Skeptics in the Pub some years ago (in the days when there was just one, instead of the several in London and the many more

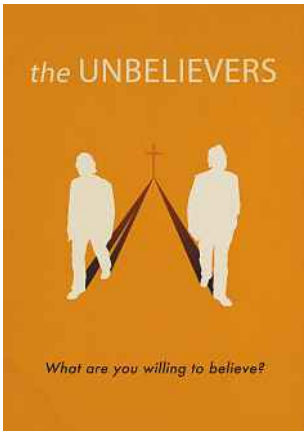
across the country today) was that I became tired of hearing from the core regulars that science had disproved one thing or another: fairies, ghosts, UFOs, faith-healing. Science, of course, had proved or disproved nothing of the kind. And unlike the early years of Skeptics in the Pub, when enquiry and discussion and different viewpoints and respect all occurred, they also showed contempt for anyone who dared hold any opinion they didn't judge worthy. With contempt comes absolutism. I've been told numerous times: "No scientist can possibly believe in God." When I've pointed out that many do, I've been told: "They must be in denial" or "They're not real scientists then".

Sceptics doubt, question and challenge; skeptics deny and condemn. Sceptics say: "Let's examine this, let's find out, let's learn". Skeptics say: "We already know; now let's close down any discussion." Scepticism is scientific. Skepticism is a closed mindset; by its very nature it limits understanding by denying diversity of belief and approach. And sometimes it does this really quite nastily.

Popper mentioned the arrogance of some atheists. Throughout *The Unbelievers* we see rationality and rectitude with a sneer on their face when Dawkins and Krauss talk about the foolishness of those with faith. Commenting on the fact that only one member of the US Congress openly doubts the existence of a Supreme Being, they query the other 500-odd: "But some of them must have had an education!"

Again there's a contrast with Popper, who once wrote: "Although I am not for religion, I do think that we should show respect for anybody who believes honestly." [3] Not if you're Dawkins. In the film he says, "I hope the day will come when nobody believes in Yahweh, as nobody believes in Thor" – incidentally displaying his ignorance of followers of the Northern Tradition today. Later he says: "Religion makes claims that need to be ridiculed with contempt."

Over the last couple of years, when I've given lectures to skeptical or rationalist audiences, I've sometimes begun with a brief explanation of why it's important to understand rather than to scorn other people's beliefs, even if we profoundly disagree with them. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy – all of these study Man, individually or collectively. They study people: their condition, activities, motivations, who and how and why they are what they are and do what they do. Huge numbers of people have religious belief, even in modern secularist Britain. We may not share those beliefs, we may think they're wrong, deluded or false – but because they are part of the worldview, the *Weltanschauung*, what sociologists call the social construction of reality of the people we're studying, we simply cannot dismiss them or ignore them. It's vital to understand the beliefs that people hold without belittling them if we want to study and understand people as they *are*, not as we might want them to be. To do otherwise is profoundly unscientific, because it's ignoring or stigmatising part of the data.



But that's exactly what Dawkins and his skeptical followers do.

Evangelical Christians often say: "I know that Jesus is alive because he's in my heart." This is inner conviction of belief, not knowledge; it doesn't make it a fact that Jesus is alive. Dawkins, Krauss and their followers have a similar inner conviction of belief that there is no God – they "know" this – but they fail to see the comparison.

I'm a social scientist rather than a physical scientist, but the same principles of scientific enquiry hold true. My academic supervisor at LSE was a friend of Karl Popper, and made sure her students understood how to think scientifically – which is probably why I get so irritated by so many so-called rationalist skeptics who don't. She would often say: "God is not an independent variable"; by which, as a sociologist of religion, she meant that science simply *cannot* make any judgement on the existence of God or on the spiritual truth of any of the religions we study. (This doesn't mean that we can't investigate and challenge factual, historical or scientific claims by religions.) But so many supposedly scientific rationalist skeptics fail to grasp that the reality or unreality of the spiritual realm is outside the remit of scientific enquiry.

This fits in well, to my mind, with the fortean approach to reports of unusual phenomena, which is sceptical in its true sense. Forteans describe and investigate; we may not be able to prove or disprove alien abductions, for example, but we can do a thorough narrative analysis on accounts of abductions, and we can bring in other relevant topics, from cultural studies to the Cold War to folklore to false memory to sleep paralysis. We use similar scholarly and scientific approaches with stories of ghosts, or reincarnation, or anything else weird and wonderful that comes to our attention.

Skeptics, by contrast, are quick to denounce any claims of the paranormal, for instance, as false and fake, as nothing but trickery and deception and ignorance. They may sometimes be correct in this – but their attitude and approach are entirely unscientific.

Real scientists in this area, like psychologists Prof Chris French of Goldsmiths College, University of London, or Prof Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire, will test such claims rather than dismissing them out of hand. What they don't do, as scientists, is mock, scoff and deride. But this is what Dawkins and Krauss do throughout their self-adulatory film.

I'm agnostic myself; I don't have any religious affiliation or belief in God. But I spend much of my life researching and writing about other people's beliefs, because I find both beliefs and believers fascinating. Dawkins and Krauss clearly don't, and that's fine; why should they? But it's evident throughout their film that they have nothing but contempt for anyone with any sort of spiritual belief.

What Dawkins and Krauss display in this film, and what I have seen in some of their followers, isn't just arrogance, but utter intolerance of anyone who doesn't share their own beliefs. It's an ugliness – I'd even say a fascistic attitude – which is the antithesis of everything I believe in as the goodness in humanity.

I watched *The Unbelievers* and I saw no love, no life, no light, no hope, no humanity. I saw only the coldness of closed minds, of those who *know* that they have The Truth, and are determined to impose it on everyone else. Dawkins and Krauss and their followers are committed believers in an anti-religion, which might just as well be a religion; they are proselytising fundamentalist atheists – and no less disagreeable than any other proselytising fundamentalists.

In EM Forster's story "The Machine Stops", filmed in the 1960s *Out of the Unknown* series (see review p64), religion with all of its superstitious trappings has been abolished. All that is necessary is written in The Book, and life is regulated by The Machine. "Praise the Machine!" characters say; "Praise the Machine!" FT

NOTES

1 My thanks to Deborah Hyde, editor of *The Skeptic*, for the invitation. This article is in no way aimed at her, or at any other skeptics who are more C than K!

2 Edward Zerin, "Karl Popper on God: The Lost Interview" (1969), *Skeptic* vol 6 no 2 (1998), pp47-48.

3 Quoted in David W Miller, *Out of Error: Further Essays on Critical Rationalism*, Ashgate 2006, p38.

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This month's books, films and games

reviews

Nothingness with twinkles...

Ye pays yer money and takes yer choice between a culturally literate take on The Beast, one that insists that Crowley was a major artist and a lurid (but fun) potboiler

Aleister Crowley

Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World

Gary Lachman

Tarcher / Penguin 2014

Pb, 388pp, illus, notes, ind, $17.95, ISBN 9780399161902

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.39

Aleister Crowley

The Beast in Berlin

Tobias Churton

Inner Traditions 2014

Hb, 386pp, illus, notes, ind, $29.95, ISBN 9781620552568

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

Tiger Woman

My Story

Betty May

Duckworth 2014

Pb, 256pp, illus, £8.99, ISBN 9780715648551

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

"It was sex that rotted him," said former Crowley associate Vittoria Cremers: "It was sex, sex, sex, sex all the way with Crowley. He was a sex maniac." She clearly had misgivings, and so does Gary Lachman in his insightful biography of a man who needs little introduction: the self-styled Beast 666, who reinvented magick, preached "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law", and ended up on the cover of *Sergeant Pepper*.

Lachman is a relaxed and personal writer, reminiscing about his days in occult bookshops (books being where the occult largely lives and has its being – "Say what you like about Satanists", as Robert Irwin writes in *Satan Wants Me*, "but they are great readers"). He says what first attracted him to Crowley was the sense that "humanity sells itself short, and we could all be so much more." So far so good, but Lachman then became disenchanted with Crowley's all-round excess, typified by young Crowley's empirical experiment into whether cats have nine lives: he submitted one to arsenic, chloroform, hanging, gassing, stabbing, slashing, smashing, burning, and drowning, before throwing it out of a window.

This excess continued into Crowley's voracious sexual career, given a tantric-Masonic bent and Latinised, "per manu", "per os" and "per vas nefandum" (by hand, by mouth, and where the sun don't shine). Crowley's passion for sex was almost equalled by his passion for casual vituperation: fellow occultist Dion Fortune, for example, was like "a hippo with false teeth" and her talk was like the "bubbling of tinned tomato soup".

Lachman's book has already annoyed the Crowleyan faithful, but he can be very generous. Crowley claimed that he didn't write his *Book of the Law* himself, but received it by dictation from a daimonic entity named Aiwass, and Lachman says: "I accept the possibility that it may have come from a disembodied intelligence". This is despite the fact that Aiwass shares Crowley's poetic style and thematic concerns, with his advice to trample the weak and see that "the slaves shall serve". Crowley has a lot in common with more flesh-and-blood entities such as Nietzsche and Freud, with his *übermensch* insistence that existence is pure joy, and that the key to genius and liberation is to get

> **"Crowley's passion for sex was almost equalled by his passion for casual vituperation"**

in tune with the unconscious. It is disappointing to find that he later became a fan of Ayn Rand, kitschy preacher of radical self-interestedness.

Crowley is a highly readable character: it would be tempting to say you can't go wrong, if one or two other books hadn't proved this to be woefully untrue. This book is packed with memorable moments, from Pearl Brooksmith (one of the Beast's Scarlet Women) saying "I feel the flame of fornication creeping up my body" to Crowley's cosmic "star-sponge vision", under the influence of anhalonium, when he realised that existence consisted of "nothingness with twinkles". It further benefits from Lachman's esoteric *nous* and feel for the human psyche, bringing in comparisons such as Aldous Huxley's almost Burrovian revelation, after mescaline, of the mind's "darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins", and the "complete autonomy" of its inner inhabitants.

This larger cultural literacy sets Lachman apart from some of Crowley's other commentators, as does his unfazed moral stance. In this respect his book is a successor to John Symonds's classic *The Great Beast*, still the only Crowley biography with literary value in its own right. For Lachman, Crowley's central significance is that he lived a life of total excess, and "showed that it doesn't work. I believe we owe him a debt of thanks for this."

There is a more reverent treatment in *The Beast in Berlin*, a specialist work covering Crowley's time in Germany from April 1930 to June 1932. It draws on Crowley's correspondence with Gerald Yorke and Karl Germer and it is a solid contribution to the field. Churton's belief that Crowley was a "reluctant prophet" is more questionable, and so is his central plank that Crowley – who exhibited his paintings in Berlin – was a major artist. The first colour plate drops this idea down a hole, and it doesn't really climb out again with any of the others. Like Churton's other books, *The Beast in Berlin* is written with unbuttoned hubris, exhilarating or bumptious according to taste, but the Beast remains as quotable as ever, whether he is explaining "we don't want more soldiers who kill the strong, but more doctors, who kill the weak", or asserting "every phenomenon ought to be an orgasm of its kind."

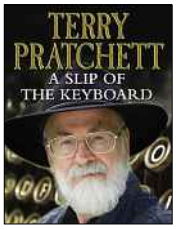
Artist's model Betty May was the partner of Oxford undergraduate Raoul Loveday, who died at Crowley's Abbey of Thelema – not, as the gutter press assumed, as the result of unspeakable depravities, but from ignoring Crowley's sensible advice not to drink the local water. There is a new musical on the cards, *Tiger Woman versus the Beast*, which has inspired the publisher to bang out this no-frills reprint of her ghost-written 1929 autobiography.

May is not a likeable woman, but her exploitation potboiler is

Continued on p56

Seriously good

Anger against unfairness does not lessen the good humour of Pratchett's essays



A Slip of The Keyboard

Collected Non-Fiction

Terry Pratchett

Doubleday 2014

Hb, 309pp, £20.00, ISBN 9780857521224

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.00

Terry Pratchett's first novel, *The Carpet People*, was published in 1971. The prolific writer has since authored a total of 50 bestselling books and won multiple prizes, including the Carnegie Medal, as well as being awarded a knighthood for services to literature. *A Slip of The Keyboard* is a collection of Pratchett's best non-fiction writing, spanning the whole of his writing career from his early years to the present. Included is an introduction by Neil Gaiman, creator/writer of the award-winning Sandman comic series, who co-wrote *Good Omens* with Pratchett. Gaiman writes: "There is a fury to Terry Pratchett's writing… it's the anger at the Headmaster who would decide that six-year-old Terry Pratchett would never be smart enough for the 11-plus; anger at pompous critics, and at those who think that serious is the opposite of funny; anger at his early American publishers who could not bring his books out successfully." It is this inner anger at things the author perceives as being unfair that is the engine behind his writing and is echoed throughout this collection, without losing any of Pratchett's characteristic good humour.

The scope of the subjects covered in the over 300-pages are vast, ranging from memories of his grandmother, from whom it seems he inherited his love of books, to speculation about the *Lord of The Ring*'s character Gandalf's love life. It is Pratchett's principled defence of causes dear to him that is the real meat of this collection, though. In December 2007, Pratchett announced that he was suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease. In an essay called "The NHS is Seriously Broken", the author writes about how a drug called Aricept, that can slow down the progression of this terrible disease, has been ruled out for use in the NHS outside Scotland because at a price of only £2.50 a day it was decided it was too expensive. A tragedy which is made worst by the way he describes how the drug has helped him, "I used to fumble with buttons and needed help with seat belts" he writes. "Now, I get dressed normally and seat belts slide in first time."

It is dealing with controversial subjects like Dignitas, a Swiss group that helps the terminally ill die, where Pratchett's powers as an essayist shine best, however. In "Death Knocked and We Let Him In", he describes visiting Switzerland to watch someone die to find out if he would still think assisted dying was a good idea afterwards. Even strong advocates against any changes in the law in Britain regarding this sombre subject will be given some pause for thought by his call for the freedom of individuals to choose how they end their own lives.

Many of the essays and articles included in the text are difficult to find individually, so with an RRP of £19.99, this hardcover edition is well worth the money for fans of Pratchett's non-fiction writing.

Richard Thomas

Fortean Times Verdict

THE INNER MIND OF A UNIQUE MYTHOLOGIST REVEALED **9**

Continued from p55

an informative period piece – the old Café Royal, for example, wasn't as grand as we now imagine but had sawdust over the floor and gilded decoration "as gaudy and as bright as possible". There are some picturesque sidelights on Crowley, including the moment he showed her a collection of bloodstained ties allegedly belonging to Jack the Ripper. She also remembers him turning up at her lodgings in Beak Street wearing a wig, and producing a bottle of hock from his sporran. It is fairly well known that students at the Abbey of Thelema had to gash themselves with a razor every time they let slip the word "I", to overcome the illusion of the ego, but not so well remembered that, at least according to May, they had to say "one" instead.

It makes the whole business sound rather genteel.

Phil Baker

Fortean Times Verdict

PERFECTLY JUDGED; PERFECTLY RESEARCHED; PERFECTLY DREADFUL **9**

Magic in Christianity

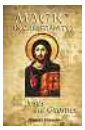
From Jesus to Gnostics

Robert Conner

Mandrake of Oxford 2014

Pb, 463pp, notes, bib, ind, £14.99 ISBN 9781906958619

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Was Jesus a magician? Although many scholars would agree that the difference between magic and miracles is a matter of stance rather than substance, and many would see him as a healer and exorcist, how many would actually call him a magician?

Robert Conner does, quite unequivocally. He is previously the author of *Jesus the Sorcerer* (2006) and *Magic in the New Testament* (2010) and his new book *Magic in Christianity* is dedicated to the late Morton Smith, author of *Jesus the Magician*.

He argues that "we see no distinction in our texts between religion and magic, between prayers and spells, or between healing and magic", these "artificially imposed categories laid down by centuries of theology".

According to Conner, we know "from ancient sources... that magic was ubiquitous in Palestine and the Mediterranean world generally in the time of Jesus, that Jesus and early Christians were accused of practising magic by their pagan opponents and by their Jewish contemporaries, and that Christians were accused of practising magic by other Christians". Jesus, he says, used "its language, behaviour and frame of reference".

When Jesus heals a man in Mark 7, for example, "he put his fingers in his ears, spit, and touched his tongue, and looking up into the sky, he groaned and said, 'Ephphatha!' that is, 'Be opened!'" All of these steps, Connor argues, both the phrasing and the actions of Jesus, "find very close parallels with similar rituals in the magical papyri". These papyri, which first surfaced in the early 19th century, are found today in two main collections, the *Papyri Græcæ Magicæ* and the *Supplementum Magicum*; they date from the 2nd century BC to the 5th century AD.

Conner studied New Testament Greek in the 1970s, and also appears to be familiar with Hebrew, Aramaic and Coptic. His book is full of Greek and occasional Hebrew quotations with his own translations, both from the Bible and from other ancient authorities, and citations from modern authors – occasionally too full, because he presents so much supporting evidence, quote after quote after quote, that it's often difficult to follow the train of his argument. He accepts that "To a large extent this book is a survey of the evidence rather than an original investigation." One might have wished for a little less survey and a little more investigation; sometimes this reader felt bludgeoned by quotations.

But the evidence he surveys does paint a strong case (albeit one-sided) for Jesus being, in some ways, a magician of his time. Not only Jesus, but his followers; Conner details magical activity by the disciples in the Acts of

the Apostles, such as Peter causing the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira; and there are plenty more magical acts by the disciples in apocryphal texts, including the famous magical battle between Peter and Simon Magus. And throughout both the New Testament and the Early Church there was an emphasis on the power of the name of Jesus.

Christian magic continued through the ages. Healing spells invoking Jesus were written on amulets from the earliest centuries through to almost modern times; today's so-called "deliverance ministry" is clearly an aggressive form of folk magic – and what are relics but a harnessing of the power dwelling in the body parts of saints?

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
OVER-DETAILED BUT INTERESTING, CONTROVERSIAL CASE **6**

Hikey Sprites

The Twilight of a Norfolk Tradition

Ray Loveday

Pb, 47pp, illus, £7.50 (inc P&P), ISBN 9780900616990
E R LOVEDAY, 54C POTTERGATE, NORWICH NR2 1DY

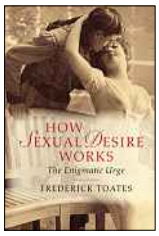
This is an exemplary field study of an endangered species from the world of faery, first mentioned in folklore records in 1872, but fast fading from collective memory. Ray Loveday interviewed more than 120 Norfolk folk, mainly in their seventies and eighties, about the elusive Hyter/Hikey Sprite. Usually encountered at dusk, they sometimes manifested as glow worms or Jack o'Lanterns, but were largely "unseen, unheard". Recalcitrant children were often threatened with them if they misbehaved or strayed after dark. Some said they were beneficent and helped mankind; others thought a Hikey Sprite was a lively or spirited person. The author identifies 'hot spots' for Hikey Sprites, but the chief attraction of this book is the verbatim reminiscences of Hikey lore.

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict
LOVELY INSIGHT INTO AND RECOVERY OF A VANISHING BELIEF **8**

It'll drive you insane

Our brains have not evolved much in recent millennia, but our attitudes to sexuality have – even if some primitive urges remain



How Sexual Desire Works

The Enigmatic Urge

Frederick Toates

Cambridge University Press 2014
Pb, 449pp, refs, ind, £27.99, ISBN 1107688043
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £25.19

Unfettered sexual desires and behaviour could yet prove to be the Achilles heel of the permissive society. Increasingly, we regard consenting adults' private activities as no one else's concern. Yet, recent scandals underscore the need to better understand, manage and prevent the tragic, devastating consequences of uncontrolled sexual desires and behaviours.

Toates has marshalled an immense amount of evidence about the complex, complicated, mutually reinforcing biological, cultural, environmental and other drivers of desire and behaviour. (Toates differentiates sexual desire, which aims to attain sexual pleasure, and behaviour. Desire doesn't always motivate sexual behaviour, which can have other, even 'ulterior', motives.) One study revealed 237 reasons why women have sex ranging from, Toates writes, "the most obvious, such as to obtain pleasure or babies, to the unbelievably obscure and Machiavellian," including revenge and power over men.

We don't need obscure, Machiavellian motives to procreate. Rats reproduce in the millions but as Toates points out, "A rat Kama Sutra would be a rather boring but mercifully very short book". Nevertheless, some human behaviour is primitive: researchers twinned images of a sexually attractive female with a penny jar. Eventually, the penny jar alone triggered an erection.

Hormones, neurotransmitters and other chemicals are also important. Hormones, for example, seem to sensitise human desire. Women tend to have more sexual fantasies, report more marked desire and are more likely to masturbate around ovulation, for instance.

Nevertheless, even the most ardent reductionist would have trouble distilling sexuality's myriad forms to crude Pavlovian reflexes and biochemical changes. Increased desire around ovulation makes evolutionary sense. Yet some women report increased desire just before and just after menstruation partly because of a reduced risk of pregnancy and "deprivation". And postmenopausal women still have sexual fantasies.

Toates argues that evolutionary psychology offers a framework to better understand how the "intermeshing of evolved brains and contemporary culture" leads to sexual behaviour and desire. Our brains have evolved little since the dawn of civilisation. But attitudes to sexuality altered beyond recognition. Mediæval healers believed that long-term virginity was a health hazard and advocated marriage or masturbation, the latter taught, if needed, by midwifes. Victorian doctors claimed "a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself". She submitted only to please her husband. Indeed, excessive female desire led to insanity.

Yet even evolutionary psychologists admit that their discipline doesn't tell the whole story. Take male jealousy, which, from an evolutionary perspective, protects the man's genetic interests. However, their partner's infidelity excites swingers and 'wife swopping' isn't confined to societies that can rely on contraception to protect the man's genetic interests. Some Aboriginal Australian, Polynesian, Indian and Inuit cultures all accept various forms of group sex or 'extramarital' liaisons.

Despite the wealth of information that Toates presents, questions remain, perhaps most fundamentally, why are some people able to control their sexual desire while in others it escalates into addiction, violence and other aberrant or dangerous behaviour? He notes that how we understand sexual desire "has profound implications for how sexual behaviour is treated in ethical, medical, social, legal and religious contexts". Toates' book makes an important contribution to a debate that society can't afford to ignore as we struggle to balance individual rights with protecting the vulnerable.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
EVERYTHING YOU EVER DESIRED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX **8**

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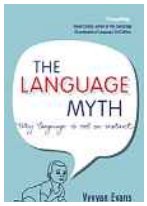
Prometheus unbound

There is no embedded universal language, says a study that fatally undermines Chomsky but fails to provide an alternative



The Language Myth

Why Language is not an Instinct

Vyvyan Evans

Cambridge University Press 2014

Pb, 304pp, bib, ind, £17.99, ISBN 9781107619753

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.19

The origin of language is easily the most intriguing mystery in the story of humanity. Our ancestors were as fascinated by the question as we are today, as evidenced by the plethora of myths and legends that surround the question, from the Tower of Babel to the alleged attempt by an ancient king (the story is attributed to a number of them) to discover the first language by locking children up incommunicado and waiting to hear the first word they spoke; the Phœnician word for bread – *beka* – is a favourite punchline of these stories.

Not everyone has thought the subject a proper one for study. In 1866, the whole question of the origin of language was banned by the founding statutes of the Linguistic Society of Paris, after a speech by von Humboldt which almost killed the science of linguistics at its birth. He claimed that language was so essential a part of what it is to be human that we could not properly conceive of humanity without language. Ergo, nothing to study here, move along now.

Luckily, von Humboldt and the Parisian savants were ignored, and much thought has been given in modern times to how we came to speak, how we came to speak different languages, and how each of us, all things being equal, will learn at least one language easily and fluently, and the majority of us more than one.

I grew up with Chomsky's theories of language: that language is innate, hard-wired into the human brain, which is equipped with a Universal Grammar that allows us to learn whichever variant of 'Humanese' we are faced with; that a visitor from another world would see (perhaps that should be 'hear'; it's a curious beast, language) that we all basically spoke the same language, based on a fixed range of rules, with local variations. And perhaps strangest of all, I and the linguistic world at large accepted Chomsky's claims that language evolved in one special individual ('call him Prometheus', as Chomsky grandly puts it), and that language actually has nothing to do with communication.

Chomsky's hopeful monster, talking only to itself like a proto-Hamlet, has finally been challenged comprehensively (it's a wonder it stood unchallenged for so long) and Vyvyan Evans's book is a good summing-up of the arguments against the old paradigm. She demonstrates that the premises of Chomsky's theory are flawed and lack supporting evidence from experiment and broad observation. He made most of his claims by thinking about how English works, and applying his insights to other languages; some, like Evans, consider this blinkered academic imperialism, and they are right.

Evans reserves the brunt of her scepticism for Chomsky himself, and his most famous contemporary follower, Steven Pinker: thus the title of the book, a direct response to, and rebuttal of, Pinker's 1994 book *The Language Instinct*, which is a hugely entertaining but almost entirely evidence-free sweep through Chomsky's world.

The negative evidence amassed in *The Language Myth* is voluminous and on the whole, completely persuasive; the work on child development, and how language acquisition actually happens, makes it quite clear that we do not have an embedded universal grammar, or a conceptual language ('Mentalese' *á la* Pinker) against which to measure the apparent babble we hear from birth, and possibly before. There are weaknesses: the passages about linguistic diversity seem to me to argue neither for nor against Chomsky, and some of the analyses of grammar were both vague and inaccurate. This may be a consequence of writing a popular book about a complex subject; but it was irritating for this reader at least to find the same kind of loose, arm-waving generalisation as Evans accuses the Chomsky camp of employing.

When it comes to a positive theory to replace Chomsky's, the book is at its weakest. Evans appeals to human uniqueness (uniqueness is the single most common characteristic on the planet), something called 'cultural intelligence', something else called 'interactional intelligence', and a version of Darwinian theory almost as baggy as Chomsky and Pinker's.

None of these conceptual tactics persuaded me that a satisfying theory of language acquisition and origins has been found to replace the current orthodoxy.

So we're back to Babel. Evans has demolished the Chomskian edifice (though it will take some time to disappear from the textbooks) but the new language-as-use theory is a decidedly shaky ziggurat.

Time to lock up the children again?

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

READABLE AND INTERESTING, BUT THE DETAILS ARE SLIPPERY **8**

Dirty Old London

The Victorian Fight Against Filth

Lee Jackson

Yale University Press

HB, 304pp, £20.00, ISBN 9780300192056

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.19

As the capital expanded, patchwork methods of disposing of rubbish, street mud and excreta could barely cope. Sewage went into cellar cesspools emptied by "night-soil men", the poor lived among filth, and cholera outbreaks threatened even the rich. Visionaries picturing temples to sewage and arteries of clean water wrangled with foot-dragging committees of jobsworths. The respectable turned a blind eye, or rushed to join the "sanitarian" movement.

Historian and novelist Lee Jackson has produced a gripping history of the great London clean-up. Chapter by chapter, we travel from rubbish disposal through street mud, cesspools, sewers and drinking water to burying the dead, washing the living, public toilets, slums, air quality and the tragic lives of child chimney-sweeps.

Thanks to the reformers, flush toilets were adopted from the mid-century, grand public baths were opened, the great sewer network still carries our effluent, the poor inhabited "model" dwellings (no donkeys allowed), and suburban "garden" cemeteries closed gruesome city burying grounds. Women were provided with public toilets, despite much sniggering and concerns over "modesty". Some visions never came to pass (a giant pyramidal necropolis on Primrose Hill, Babylonian pillars all along the Thames Embankment – sketched by painter John Martin, whose hobby was designing sewers).

We're living in the city the Victorians created, and we still like to look the other way. If we want clean pavements, we have to wait for a heavy shower. I'm sure there's a better solution somewhere in this excellent book.

Lucy R Fisher

Fortean Times Verdict

PUT YOUR WELLIES ON FOR A WADE THROUGH OUR GRUBBY CAPITAL **9**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

DNA of the Gods

Chris H Hardy

Bear & Co 2014

Pb, 246pp, bib, ind, $18.00, ISBN 9781591431855

Not, as you might expect, about those promiscuous Greek gods, but another riff on the Anunnaki theories of the late Zaccharia Sitchin. Chris Hardy – who had a doctorate in "ethno-psychology" among other distinctions, including researching "non-local [that phrase again] consciousness" at Princeton – choses to begin with the Sumerian account of how their gods created humankind and then mated with them. Hardy branches from conventional 'ancient astronautics' to develop a strong thesis that touches upon the historical and social processes of marginalising, subjugating and dominating women, promoting a belief in their inferiority and enforced by many means from slavery to taboos. She shows, by skillfully deconstructing old mythologies and key historical incidents (eg. Joan of Arc, who went from peasant girl to national saviour to being executed as a witch in three years), the social processes of this misogyny, the ways mythology was used to rationalise it, and its psychological consequences which are still active today, not least of which being the collateral damage to the male psyche. Interesting, well written, well researched and powerfully argued, yet restrained.

The Sacred History

Jonathan Black

Quercus 2014

Pb, 510pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9781780874876

Black concludes this encyclopædic examination of mysticism with the question, "Is it clumsy to try to use the whole of history to trace back to its roots that most evanescent of experiences – the feeling that the thought you have just had isn't something you can really, safely, justifiably call your own?" This is not another 'secret history' book but a sacred history of "how angels, mystics and higher intelligences made our world" and forms a very good companion to Chris Hardy's book above. The answer to Black's question is an emphatic 'No!' when your guide wants to know and is completely comfortable using very modern references alongside classical and historical ones in writing that is clear and compelling. Here is a deep deconstruction of such phenomena as apparitions and encounters with luminous entities – strangely satisfying. It's as if Patrick Harpur were channelling Colin Wilson. One to re-read.

A Brief History of Death

WM Spellman

Reaktion Books 2014

Hb, 253pp, bib, refs, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781780232652

After the spate of near-death and out-of-the-body experience books comes this refreshing step back to examine the nature of the death experience culturally, historically, psychologically and personally. Spellman, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina, explores nearly every conceivable topic related to our demise – from the mind–body problem, beliefs, burials, taboos, suicide, grief, infant mortality, legal and philosophical definitions, and very much more. Do we have faith in a better existence in the Afterlife whether Elysian Fields, Valhalla, Cockaigne, Brahma-loka or something else? Go with Democritus: "Get used to believing that death is nothing to us, for all good and bad consists in sense experience and death is the privation of sense experience". Chill with Zhuang Zhou: "I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on". Take Buddha's advice to extend compassion to all things while freeing oneself from the cycle of reincarnation (after all, who wants to come back as a tin of milk?) or attempt to become one with everything... The bottom line is that every day an estimated 155,000 people die on this Earth and one day it will be your turn. Recommended reading as an antidote to modern life.

FORTEAN FICTION

The Motherless Oven

Rob Davis

SelfMadeHero

Pb, 160pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781906838812

Ordinary

Rob Williams and D'Israeli

Titan Books

Pb, 120pp, £14.99 ISBN 9781782760092

These two very different graphic novels from British creators have quite a lot in common on closer examination. In Rob Davis's *The Motherless Oven*, teenager Scarper Lee lives in a strange yet familiar world in which children build their own parents – his dad's a wind-powered brass construction with impressive sails, his mum a chatty Bakelite hair dryer – though they don't remember doing so, and there are no birthdays, only deathdays. Scarper's is imminent, but when dad is untethered from the garden shed in which he lives and goes missing, the teenager sets out on a quest for the Boundary and the answers about his own origins that might lie beyond it. In *Ordinary*, by Rob Williams and D'Israeli, Michael Fisher is a self-centred, hapless loser whose sadsack status is only confirmed when a mysterious airborne virus gives everyone else in the world superpowers. As New York descends into chaos, Michael has to get from Queens to Manhattan to save his estranged son.

Each of these new books takes the idea of the hero's journey and cuts it down to quotidian size and contemporary settings. Davis conjures up a recognisably drab slice of English suburban life and systematically transforms it, through a sort of twisted dream logic, into something very odd indeed; but this tale of youthful rebellion and soul-searching is also an old-fashioned coming-of-age tale in which the three chums are always dressed in their school uniforms; Davis's thick-lined, illustrative, monochrome images are somehow redolent of old British movies from *Tiger Bay* to *Billy Liar*, even if Scarper's odyssey ends up going in a far darker direction.

Ordinary, despite its high-concept premise and use of a New York landscape more familiar from mainstream superhero comics, turns out to be a coming of age tale too; while a full-grown man, Michael has yet to prove himself a competent adult, and it's only when his very ordinariness is all that's left to him that this becomes a possibility. Williams's story is fast and funny, where Davis's is a more earnest and carefully paced affair, and Michael's self pity isn't indulged as much as Scarper's teenage angst. D'Israeli's more stylised art offers a contrast too, particularly for its use of eye-popping colours, which bring out the full trippiness of the transformation of a city of normal people into talking bears, beer apporters, living bombs and giant baseball players. Arguably, neither book is startlingly original, but both offer fresh and enjoyable – and enjoyably contrasting – riffs on familiar literary themes, and each is visually stunning, though in very different ways. Whether you prefer the tentatively positive direction of travel offered by *Ordinary* to the amiguously deathward trajectory of *The Motherless Oven* will be a matter of taste; I'd recommend trying both of these impressive efforts.

David Sutton

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

Interstellar

Dir Christopher Nolan, US 2014

On UK release

Future Earth has been reduced to a post-apocalyptic dustbowl, its last surviving crops barely able to sustain the only humans still alive. Basically, we're doomed. Cooper, (Matthew McConaughey) once a NASA pilot, now a crotchety survivor/farmer, still secretly dreams of the stars but seems resigned to man's inevitable fate. His daughter Murphy, definitely more of an optimist, witnesses an event which, in a manner bearing all the hallmarks of poltergeist activity, communicates a binary code leading to a mysterious camp. There, in a secret underground bunker, the remnants of NASA are furtively dreaming up a master plan to save humanity. And Cooper is the guy to make it all happen.

But Cooper's not a swaggering, confident cosmonaut. He's one of those earthy science dudes that you only ever see in American films, and of course his adolescent daughter means the world to him. And his heart-wrenching dilemna lies in leaving her to save humanity. It's ALL VERY IMPORTANT, and nothing is too corny or too obvious to be used to hammer that point into our brains.

Subjected to three hours of *Interstellar*, I honestly tried to appreciate the gravity of the world's end and the ensuing search for mankind's new home, but was only left with a sense that rather than the death of humanity I might actually be witnessing the death of cinema. Could we push things any further than Nolan does here ?

In a desperate attempt to create the most meaningful sci-fi odyssey ever, *Interstellar* has cranked up every sensory stimulus to 11, but to no avail. Even the deafening soundtrack, blaring out at every significant or insignificant event, failed to convince me how important this whole endeavour to save Earth was. It might have been the corny dialogue and predictable relationships, seemingly tailored to make me *feel* something, or the series of overlong black-hole tunnel sequences, which I no doubt should have been marvelling at while I anxiously anticipated the new planets we were soon to discover.

A few sequences on these new worlds offered some good ideas and the possibility that the story might take a turn for the better. But the moment we hit the final act, with its unintelligible foray into the fourth, fifth or sixth dimension, I was more than ready to return to Earth via the cinema's exit door. I'd resigned myself to the fact that most films that lean on some self-important, metaphysical shtick to explain their uncanny events rarely manage to muster any visceral emotional impact. Comparisons to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* are unwarranted. These two films stand poles apart, with one being a stylised, cool and, above all, consistent vision, the other a juddering juggernaut of emotional manipulation strapped to the back of a space shuttle. If anyone in Hollywood today has been given the creative freedom to go beyond infinity, it's golden boy Christopher Nolan, but *Interstellar* never blasts free of current cinematic convention.

Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict
A DEAFENING, PORTENTOUS JUGGERNAUT OF A MOVIE **4**

Out of the Unknown

Created by Irene Shubik, UK 1965-71

BFI, £69.99 (7 DVDs)

For any longtime SF fan, the *Out of the Unknown* DVD box set from the British Film Institute is an Aladdin's Cave, a dragon's hoard – just an astonishing collection of classic stories. Okay, half of them are black and white, but that just adds to their charm. And some of the earlier ones have pretty ropey acting and production – but it's easy to forget that British TV was like that in 1965. Especially in the first series, filming was effectively live; if actors stumbled over their lines they just repeated them and carried on. According to a fascinating documentary on the final disc, the 50-60 minute programmes were filmed in just three hours, using a multi-camera technique.

Unfortunately, because of the BBC's "broadcast and wipe" policy, many of the episodes are missing: 24 out of a total of 50 from the four series. But that still leaves seven DVDs with 22 episodes (one of them incomplete), with a further four reconstructed from the audio tape and stills.

Out of the Unknown (1965-71) was created and produced by Irene Shubik, who had previously worked on ITV's *Out of this World* before following Sidney Newman to the BBC. It followed the same format as *The Wednesday Play* (1964-70) and *Boy Meets Girl* (1967-69) – a series of one-off dramas, most of them new adaptations of stories by well-known writers, some of them original plays.

"Good science fiction is a way of saying something you can't say in straightforward terms... [it is] the nearest modern approach to the mediæval romance, the fable and the work of such satirists as Swift. I tried to get [stories] that

had some sort of message," Shubik said in 1975.

There are adaptations of novels and stories by Isaac Asimov, Frederik Pohl, CM Kornbluth, John Wyndham, John Brunner, JG Ballard and many more. The dramatists who adapted the stories for the screen included writers of the calibre of JB Priestley, a founding member of CND, who adapted Mordecai Roshwald's nuclear holocaust novel *Level 7*.

Some are set off-planet – including Asimov's detective novel *The Naked Sun* and Wyndham's *No Place Like Earth*, which contrasts a gentle pastoral lifestyle on Mars and a brutal totalitarian community on Venus – but most are Earth-based. Several are socio-psychological studies: JG Ballard's *Thirteen to Centaurus* is about the effects on a crew confined to a spaceship for decades, while the original screenplay *Stranger in the Family* concerns the social consequences for a young and powerfully telepathic mutant (two of the actors, John Paul and Joby Blanshard, were to join up again in *Doomwatch* a few years later).

Several episodes stand out, including two by Frederik Pohl. *The Midas Plague* is a dark comedy about rampant consumerism: the lower down the social scale you are, the fewer hours you have to work and the more goods you must consume; in his *Tunnel under the World* characters relive the events of the same day over and over again, while assailed by advertising slogans. EM Forster's *The Machine Stops* (first published in 1909) is a discomfiting view of a future where people live in isolation, communicating only electronically and rarely meeting; their lives are governed and all needs are supplied by the Machine, which has taken the place of religion – but what will happen if the Machine breaks down?

One of the more unusual original stories, *Come Buttercup, Come Daisy, Come...?*, about a back garden of sentient and aggressive plants, is notable for its cast including Jack Wild (later the Artful Dodger) and Eric Thompson of *Magic Roundabout* fame. Throughout the series it's delightful seeing young versions of several later well known actors: Hannah Gordon, Geoffrey Palmer, Patsy Rowlands, Michelle Dotrice

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

BLACULA: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

Dir Wiliam Crain, Bob Kelljan US 1972/1973
Arrow Video, £18.99 (Dual Format)

The 1970s saw an explosion of blaxploitation films when studios started to realise that not only were movies with black talent great draws for the black audience but some of them were achieving great crossover success too. American International Pictures, who were known for their horror output such as the Roger Corman/Edgar Allen Poe movies, spotted an opportunity and put out a version of *Dracula* with perhaps one of the most efficient titles in movie history: *Blacula*. It's another riff on updating Stoker's classic legend to 'modern day' America; shlocky as it sounds, the film – and its sequel *Blacula Blah* – have a real edge in their brilliant lead actor. William Marshall was a stage and TV regular known for playing authoritative and regal characters with a deep, Darth Vader voice to match. Cast as 'Dracula's soul brother' (as the trailer puts it) he brings a surprising sense of dignity to what ought to be a silly, eye rolling part, yet somehow isn't.

Marshall also suggested a great angle to the story itself: Blacula begins the movie not as a vampire but as an impressive African Prince called Mamuwalde who visits Count Dracula to encourage him to help stop the slave trade. Dracula is incensed (turns out he's as averse to racial equality as he is to sunlight) and so he condemns the prince to a Barnabas Collins-style curse. Mamuwalde is trapped in a coffin for two centuries until a couple of gay interior designers buy up the casket and ship it to contemporary L.A. They crack it open and out leaps Blacula, ready to satiate a blood thirst that's tormented him for 200 years.

In another echo of *Dark Shadows*, Blacula happens to bump into the reincarnation of his previous wife, who Dracula left to rot in the bowels of his castle all those years before. Cue scenes of love rekindled and reunited – and neck biting death to anyone who gets in the way.

The film made enough box office traction to summon up a sequel, *Scream Blacula Scream*. For my money, it's the better movie. Pam Grier plays a voodoo priestess whose rival summons Blacula to re-materialise from his sun-scorched bones. This time Marshall's motivation isn't to find his lost love, but to seek a Voodoo cure for the curse of the undead. The sequel has sharper direction and feels a lot more suspenseful; it even has a few scary moments. Blacula himself gets to say a lot more too, pontificating with a university professor about the existence of vampires and the puny-ness of humanity in the face of the fortean world. It hasn't got as good a soundtrack as the original, and the opening sequence is nowhere near as cool; but if you insist I'm only allowed to take one *Blacula* movie down into the bunker when the stars finally go out, I'll take *Scream*, please.

Fortean Times Verdict

1970s BLAXPLOITATION-HORROR MASH-UP STILL HAS BITE **7**

and more.

The third series, now in colour, lost Shubik, but not before she had commissioned the scripts. It has also lost the most episodes, with only one surviving in its entirety, John Brunner's *The Last Lonely Man*, which deals with personal and social consequences of a type of immortality: when you die you can have your personality pass into a friend or relative – but what happens if you're so unpleasant nobody wants you? Half an hour of CM Kornbluth's *The Little Black Bag* survives, a story of greed and selfishness in which a struck-off doctor and his money-grabbing assistant use a medical bag from the future to perform instant cosmetic surgery – with a conclusion that still shocks. The other three episodes from the series are reconstructions.

The fourth series changed direction from adaptations to original stories and from SF to horror/supernatural, losing much of the distinctiveness of the programme; it also lost the wonderfully psychedelic opening credits by Bernard Lodge (best known for the early *Doctor Who* title sequences), which were even better in colour in the third series than in the monochrome first two. The move away from SF led to some distasteful choices. *Deathday* is about a brutal domestic murder; *To Lay a Ghost* begins with the rape of a teenage girl; *Welcome Home* is about deliberate identity confusion, *This Body is Mine* about mind transference and *The Man in my Head*, the best of the bunch, is about military mind control – and in each one there's coercion, unpleasantness or death. What the other episodes in this series were like, who knows? – but it's a great shame that the one story by Nigel Kneale (starring Patrick Troughton) is one of those wiped.

The fourth series was a lacklustre end to an otherwise innovative and still often startlingly powerful SF series from the Sixties which – partly because so many episodes are now lost – is now part of the BBC's own mythology. This seven-DVD set has commentaries on many episodes, stills galleries and a 44-page booklet.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
A NOSTALGIC TV TRIP TO THE PAST'S FUTURE **8**

Out of This World: Little Lost robot

Creator Irene Shubik, UK 1962

BFI,, £19.99 (DVD)

Out of This World, a spin-off from *Armchair Theatre*, was an "anthology" series on ITV, a collection of adaptations of science fiction stories – and the precursor of BBC2's *Out of the Unknown*. The same person was responsible for both: Irene Shubik. Each episode was introduced by Boris Karloff.

Only one episode survives, *Little Lost Robot*, one of the famous Susan Calvin stories in Isaac Asimov's collection *I, Robot*. Dr Calvin (theatre and film actress Maxine Audley) is a robo-psychologist and the creator of the Three Laws of Robotics. She's called off-planet when a scientist, annoyed with the robot working with him, tells it to get lost; the robot does so by mingling in with a new consignment of 20 identical robots. The only trouble is, it had been modified to reduce the first Law: A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. How will Dr Calvin work out which of the 21 robots is the dangerous modified one?

Other main characters were played by Gerald Flood, who appeared in many other programmes including *Pathfinders in Space* and its sequels, and as the voice of the android Kamelion in *Doctor Who*, and Clifford Evans, who appeared in two Hammer films, *The Avengers* and as Number Two in an episode of *The Prisoner*.

There's a fascinating commentary by producer Leonard White, now in his 90s, with his recollections of the series. A VidFIRE version restores how the programme would have appeared to its original viewers.

The DVD also contains audio-only amateur recordings of two other episodes, Tom Godwin's *Cold Equations* with Peter Wyngarde and a young Jane Asher, and Philip K Dick's *Imposter*, adapted by Terry Nation, who would go on to create the Daleks the following year, and a PDF of the script of John Wyndham's *Dumb Martian*.

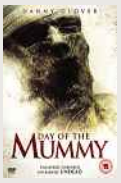
David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE VINTAGE TV TREASURE FROM THE 1960S **7**

SHORTS

DAY OF THE MUMMY

Image Entertainment, £9.99 (DVD)



An example of shamefully cynical zero-effort film-making, this does the bare minimum and no more. Even if one can overlook the unoriginal premise – intrepid archæologist hired to retrieve fabled gem from mummy's tomb – there is little to recommend. We have a couple of fading star names for the poster (Danny Glover, who literally phones his performance in, and William McNamara, who is off screen for most of the film) and a bunch of nobodies to do the rest of the work. Instead of a mummy's tomb, we get a couple of rocky passages that might as well be in Kents Cavern, and in order to keep costs down the whole thing is shot POV. There are one or two witticisms and, eventually, a genuinely scary mummy, but such moments are spread so thin that a 77-minute movie feels an awful lot longer. If the film-makers can't be bothered there's no reason why you should. **Daniel King** 3/10

DEBUG

Signature Entertainment, £9.99 (Blu-ray), £7.99 (DVD)

This cheap looking sci-fi horror flick offers little that hasn't been seen before. Six convicted hackers are sent to debug and reboot a vast abandoned spaceship where they find a rogue program is in charge and has no intention of being shut down. The script, full of dated computer jargon, is as dull as the visuals, which manage to make a giant intergalactic freighter look like the interior of a Ford Focus. The hackers are bumped off one by one in a *Seven* sort of way – lust, greed, etc – but it isn't followed though, and before long writer-director David Hewlett has resorted to shots of women in their underwear and lots of running backwards and forwards. There's no one of any interest in it apart from Jason Momoa (*Conan*, *Game of Thrones*) but he's strictly a muscle man. What it really needs is a Brad Dourif or Michael Ironside to draw attention away from the charisma vacuum elsewhere. By the time it draws to a close, Hewlett has given up completely and what is supposed to be a hi-tech SF film ends with a martial arts sword fight from beyond the grave. **DK** 4/10

NATURAL BORN KILLERS

Warner Home Video, £16.99 (Blu-ray)

Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers,* based on an early Tarantino script, was hugely controversial on its original release in 1994 (and fingered for over a dozen supposed 'copycat' murders). This director's cut – restoring some 150 edits – is undoubtedly closer to the censor-baiting onslaught Stone intended, although 20 years of ultra-violent films later it seems pretty tame. What will still rankle with some is the film's refusal to judge its exuberant spree-killers Mickey and Mallory as they maraud down Highway 666; but Stone's ire is reserved solely for an idiotic and sensationalist media that, for him, was plumbing new and unforgivably exploitative depths by the 1990s. As in *Psycho*'s shower scene, the real violence is in the editing of this rapid-fire stylistic mash-up that jumps from 35 to 8mm, from TV documentary to sitcom, from cartoon to newsreel (OJ Simpson, Waco) in the blink of an eye. By the film's second half prison riot, the visual frenzy becomes irrestistable and hysterical, with Tommy Lee Jones's spittle-spraying prison governer and Robert Downey Jnr's narcissistic TV reporter remaining hilarious high points. Good extras. **DS** 7/10

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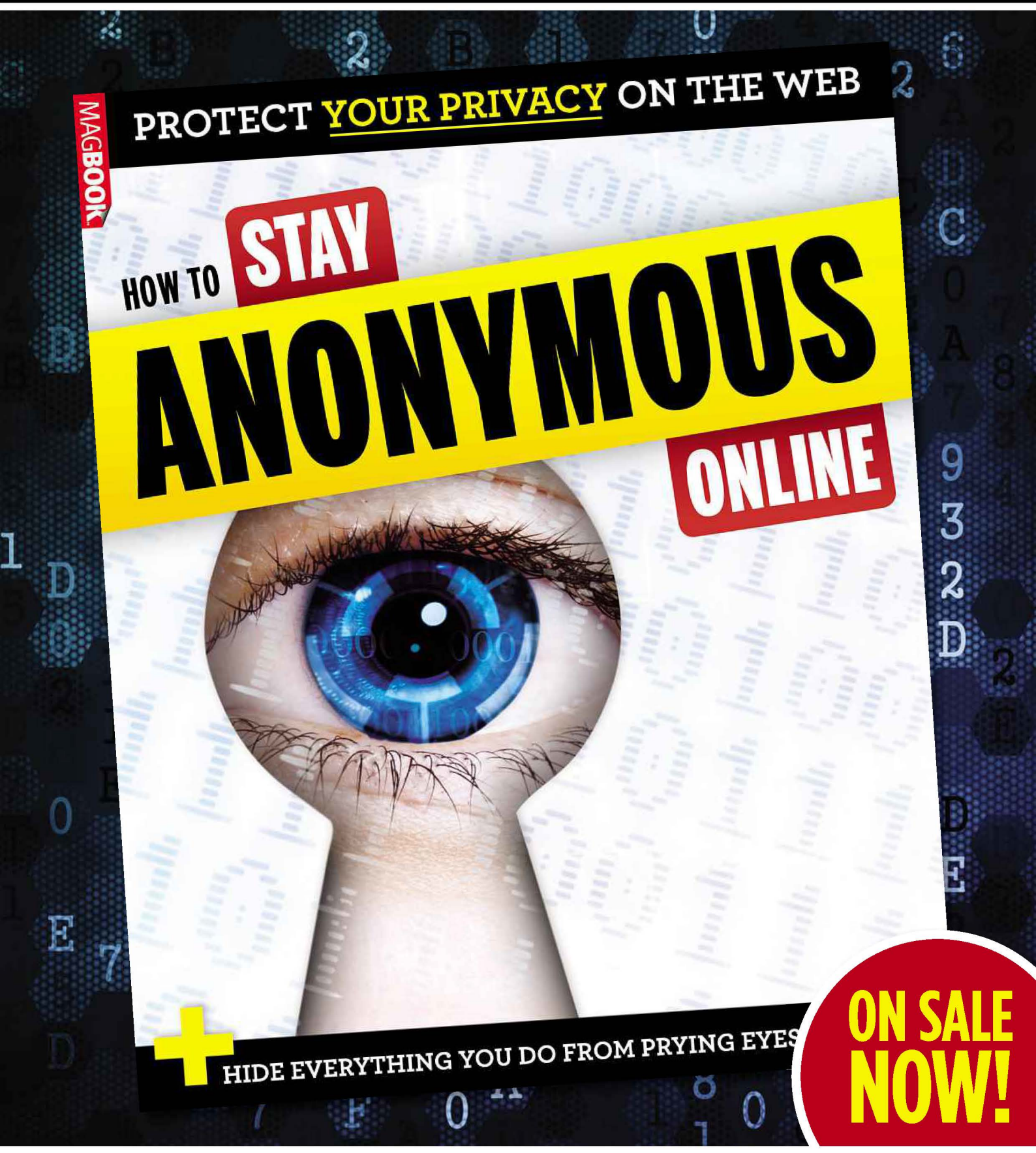

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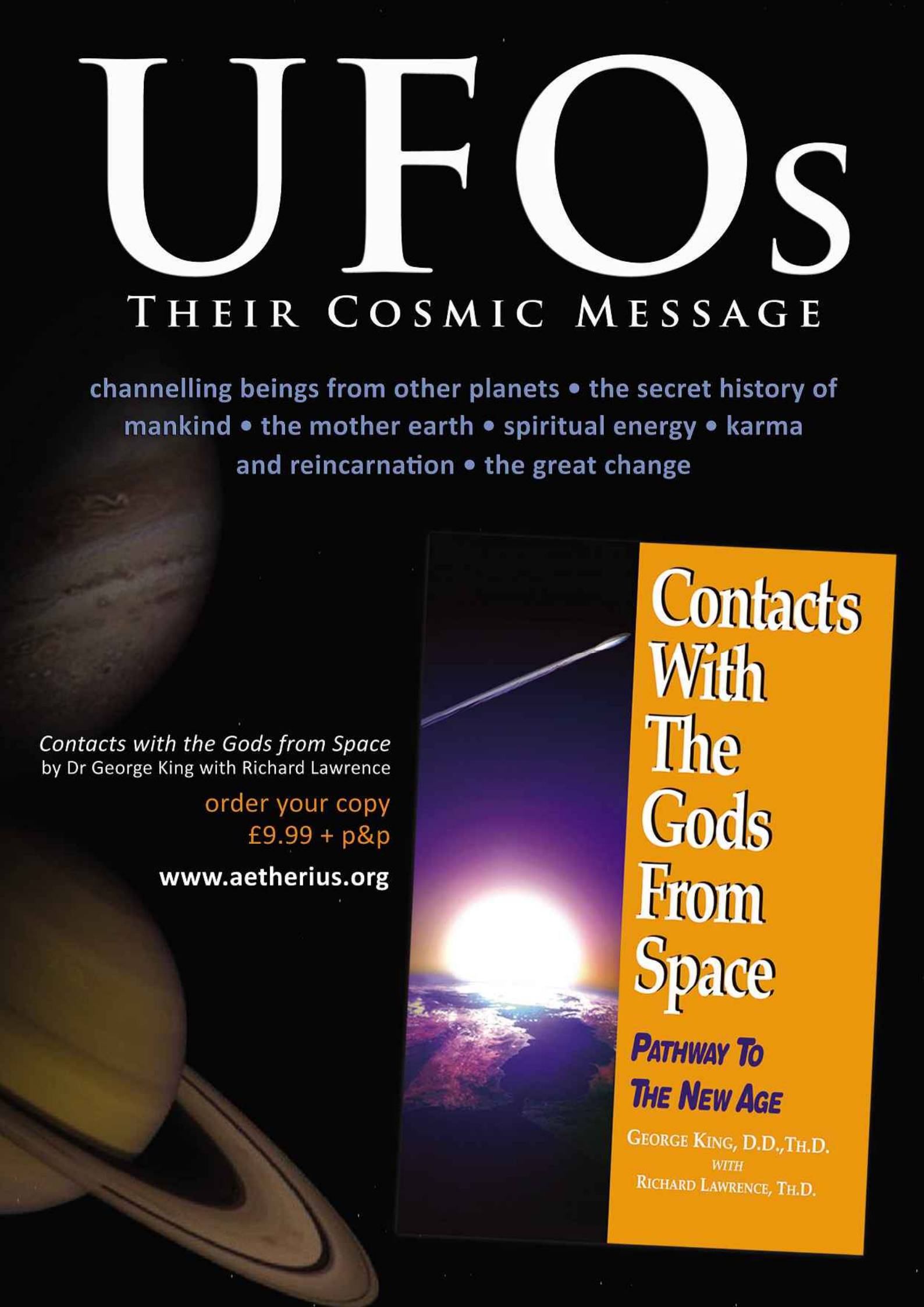

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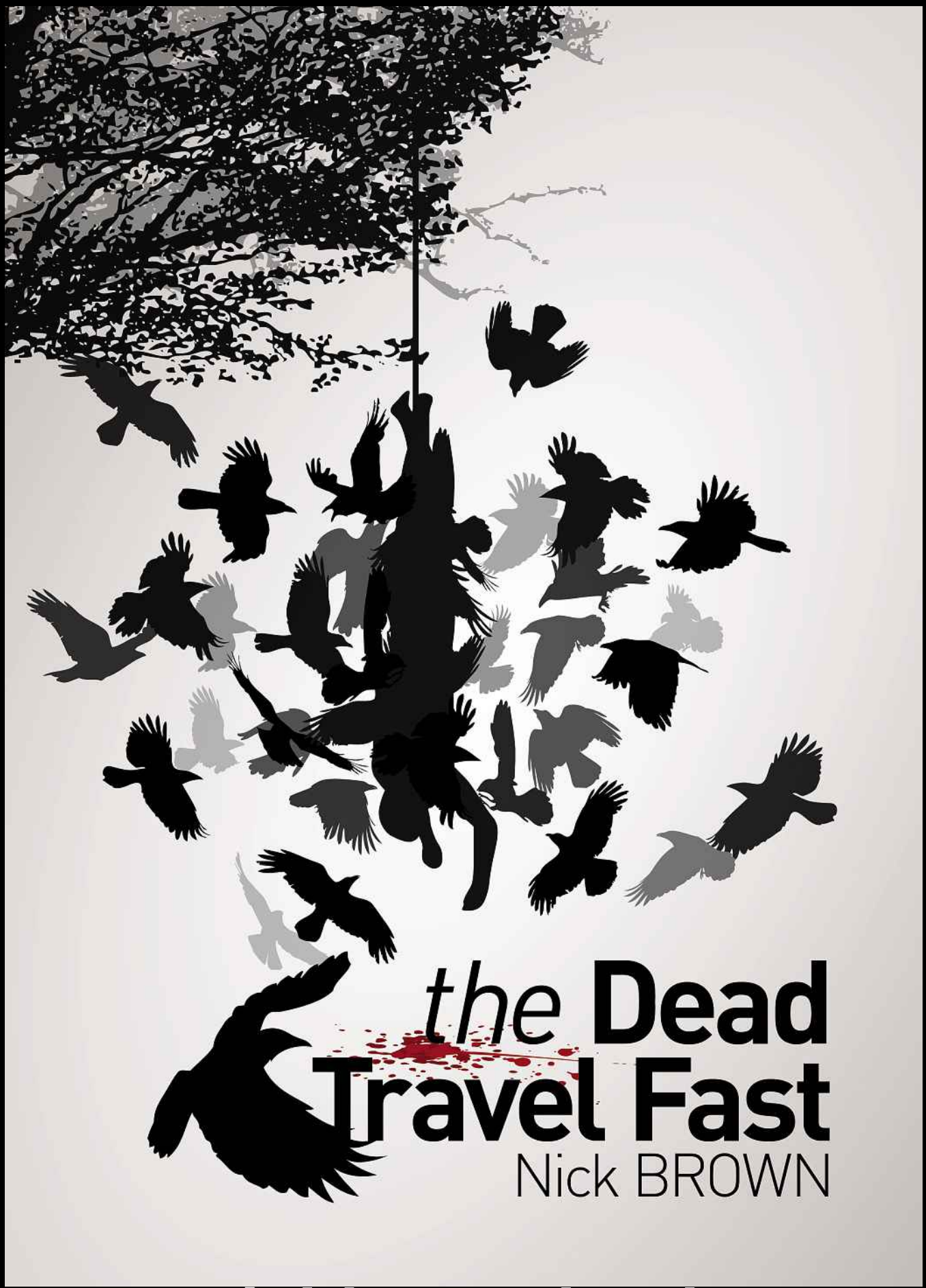

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Dear FT...

letters

Keep rolling, rolling, rolling...

SD Tucker brings forward some poltergeist cases in which strange woollen balls have been seen [**FT319:71**] – and suspects that further research might reveal more of these cases. I have collected archive narratives of about 50 Finnish poltergeists and, indeed, in two cases there are eyewitness testimonies of these mysterious balls. The Mäkisalo ghost (Isojoki, Finland 1936) was once seen as a grey head-sized woolly ball, which followed one of the spectators in the ghost house. In Oijärvi school dormitory (Kuivaniemi, Finland 1946) the ghost was seen on a bed as a soft woollen bundle, which felt furry when touched. Then there is the Kylmänoja case (Loppi, Finland 1850), in which the ghost used to roll as a woolly ball in front of the central person, a young girl. Of this, however, there are no eyewitness testimonies.

So it seems that these balls are not purely folklore. Usually the poltergeist is invisible, but it may be possible that in some cases the poltergeist energy manifests in visible form. Further research is indeed needed.

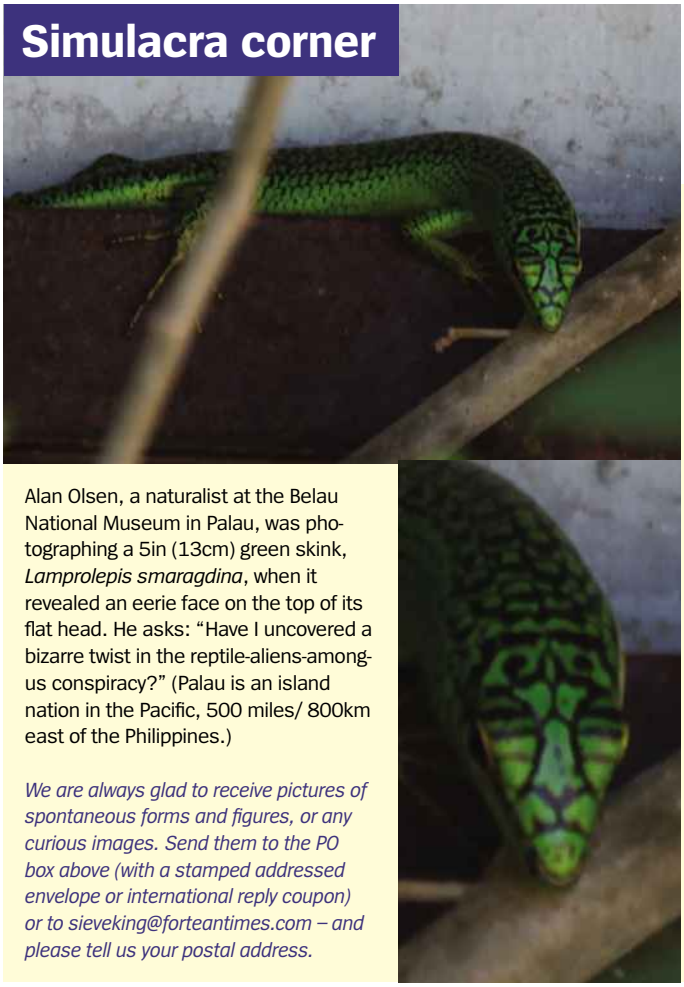
Heikki Tikkala
Taipalsaari, Finland

The recent article and letters regarding a "weird entity" manifesting as a ball of wool or the like, moving by rolling across the ground [**FT315:25, 317:70, 319:71**], reminded me of the antagonist in a rather good 1919 children's fantasy, *Knock Three Times* by Marion St John Webb (aka Marion St John Webb Adcock). Said villain – a malignant dwarf who causes the death of the old king's daughter, learns black magic, and has an underground movement of vile but plausible-seeming spies working for him – bears the unfortunate name of the "The Gray Pumpkin". I quote from a review I posted to an Internet group a few years ago: "And what does he look like? A big gray pumpkin. One with an evil black magician dwarf magically trapped inside, of course, but still to outward seeming just a big gray pumpkin that moves by slowly rolling over and over, chasing people. As long as you keep your eyes open even the kids can outrun him."

The movement-as-menace factor strikes me as a bit more menacing, though, now that I've read of folkloric precedents in these pages. (Still, a pity about the risible name.)

Dennis Lien
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Simulacra corner



Alan Olsen, a naturalist at the Belau National Museum in Palau, was photographing a 5in (13cm) green skink, *Lamprolepis smaragdina*, when it revealed an eerie face on the top of its flat head. He asks: "Have I uncovered a bizarre twist in the reptile-aliens-among-us conspiracy?" (Palau is an island nation in the Pacific, 500 miles/ 800km east of the Philippines.)

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

The Devil reviewed

I am not sure to what extent Noel Rooney's review of Philip Almond's *The Devil: A New Biography* [**FT320:57**] reflects the book and to what extent it reflects the reviewer's prejudices. However, I am certain that the argument to which he devotes most of his review – that evil is inexplicable in the context of a good God – is nonsense and easily refuted.

Let me set out the refutation briefly: Freedom is a good thing. Freedom necessarily involves the possibility of making choices. It is therefore desirable that human beings (and angels, if they exist) should be able to make choices. Therefore, there must be things between which they can make choices. If only good existed (and not evil) there could be no choice. Therefore, human freedom depends on the possibility of making choices, and this requires the existence of good and evil as the things between which we must choose. This argument can only be rejected if you deny the initial premise (that freedom is a good thing). Those who reject this premise are arguing that a good God would desire a world in which, unable to choose between good and evil, we choose good because it is the only option. In other words, a world of sheep: from which, in the words of Sam Goldwyn, include me out!

Martin Jenkins
London

Noel Rooney responds: My review was about the ideas conveyed in the book; the review is only 1,000 words and, like most people, I would require considerably more space to rehearse my personal prejudices. If Mr Jenkins has come up with a solution to the problem of evil which is satisfactory to him, all well and good, but it is unlikely – for mundanely temporal reasons – to assuage the worries of mediæval theologians.

Editor's note: It seems unlikely Mr Jenkins's position on theodicy will lay to rest a conundrum that has exercised the minds of Church Fathers and theologians at least since the time of SS Irenæus and Augustine of Hippo.

Thumbing it

Regarding the significance of sticking your thumb out for a lift [Mythchaser, **FT320:23**]: according to Desmond Morris's book *Bodytalk*, jerking your thumb up and down by the side of the road will not insult anyone with the imputation that they are cuckolded. No, it will look like you are inviting them to a manly exchange. Assuming, of course, you are yourself a man and the motorist on the receiving end is too. On the receiving end, that is, of the hand-signal. This is apparently a risk in Sardinia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, the Middle East, Russia, parts of Africa and Australia. Of course, if you know your Jack Kerouac it's just part of the Rules of the Road. Otherwise, yes, you're in for a shock.

James Wright
By email

letters

Mini correction

With reference to Victor Roberts's account in "It happened to me" [**FT317:73**], in 1974 his Austin Mini could only have been 15 years old, not 20 as he says, since the earliest Mini was produced in 1959.

David Howse
By email

Epigenetics

I enjoyed "Evolution's maze" by Toni Melechi [**FT318:48-52**], not least because it stands as yet another wonderful example of Fort's assertion that nothing in science is "more than the proper thing to wear for a while".

Lamarckism is currently enjoying a weird afterlife through the study of *epi*genetics. It is no longer controversial to suggest that an organism's experience will lead to inheritable changes, not to its genes exactly, but to the expression of those genes via epigenetic factors associated with DNA that control gene regulation. For example, animals exposed to starvation conditions respond with changes in growth, life expectancy, reproductive strategies, and so forth, that can affect their grandchildren.

Meanwhile, authors such as Steven Pinker (*The Blank Slate*) and Robert Wright (*The Moral Animal*) have done much to fight the behaviourist tyranny of the *tabula rasa* – pushing forward a range of plausible hypotheses on inherited and instinctual aspects of human behaviour. (I admit, however, that Pinker is very weak on his explanation of music and the arts.)

If instinct and behaviour are partly involved, then it follows that epigenetics may affect behavioural as well as physical changes. Pushing the envelope, I notice that a fresh round of experiments with mice has recently been published in *Nature* (with a set-up that would have given Professor McDougall a touch of déjà vu). The authors appear to suggest that fearful responses to chemical stimuli can indeed be inherited epigenetically (Google the author 'Brian Dias' for the link). While I can't vouch for the veracity of that research, I can see nothing conceptually wrong with it, nor do McDougall's theories look quite as dated or ridiculous as Melechi might assume.

However, I would like to emphasise that the political concept of eugenics, when applied to humans, remains wholly wrong-headed and ethically odious.

Ryan Shirlow
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Horror comics

As someone who started reading comic books at the age of six and has never quit the habit, I was disappointed in Robert Guffey's overview of 1950s horror comics [**FT320:28-35**]. The American federal government dropped the atomic bomb, trafficked in Nazis after the fall of the Third Reich, began a 'cold war' against the Soviet Union and unleashed the McCarthy hearings on the public – but what, specifically, did any of that have to do with the reaction some parents and educators had to children and teenagers reading horror comics?

I think that anyone who appreciates 1950s horror comics would agree that many stories, and occasionally entire issues, were often extreme in terms of content. Isn't that part of what made them thrilling, that the horror comics of that era often actually were transgressive? Isn't that what still makes them thrilling, even culturally valuable, today?

I believe asking whether comic books graphically depicting eye-gougings, beheadings, extreme torture, cannibalism, and dismemberment are a 'good influence' on young children is a valid question. Obviously, some adults will think such content harmless, and others will disagree, but I don't think we can casually dismiss the latter opinion out of hand. And while many of those horror comics clearly had an intentional or semi-intentional subtext relating in some way to the actual contemporary atrocities of the real world, clearly most adults of the era were not objecting to that subtext, whether it referred to the disfigured soldiers wounded in war, the bombing of Hiroshima, or political corruption in high places. Most were simply objecting to what they saw on the page when their attention was drawn to it: rib cages being torn open, bloody severed hands, people being crushed between spike-lined closing walls, rats eating women alive, and so on.

We know that Wertham and others did aggressively object to what they saw as the subtext in some superhero comics, such as Wertham's famous charge that the Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson of the *Batman* comics were homosexual lovers. But I don't believe that 'subtext' was what bothered most adults regarding horror comics. For certain temperaments, and the kind of temperaments which dominated in that conservative era, there was a lot that was much more immediate to object to.

Lastly, it has to be remembered that even something as tame as L Frank Baum's famous *Oz* series was banned by many libraries and organised librarian groups in the first two-thirds of the 20th century.

Joseph Barnes
By email

The feature on American horror comics brought back memories. As a kid growing up in Malaysia near British Army camps during the first half of the 1950s, I recall trading my comics from home (the *Eagle*, in particular) for these lurid fantasies, then trading them on for more. Where the British soldiers got them from I have no idea – it was often mentioned that Churchill had them banned back home and I certainly had to hide them from my father. They played a significant role in the development of my imagination and love for SF and fantasy and, somehow, knowing they were forbidden made the excitement more delicious.

Bob Rickard
By email

It appears that Robert Guffey hasn't read *The Venona Secrets* [by Herbert Romerstein and Eric Breindel, 2000] or the many recent, balanced studies that have proven [Senator Joseph] McCarthy correct. Even BBC radio, after decades of McCarthy bashing, produced the programme *There Really Were Reds Under The Beds*.

I lived in 1950s America. Robert Guffey didn't. It wasn't the dark, haunted house so beloved of art film directors and Soviet apologists. It was a spectacularly prosperous, colourful, creative and sexy world. Take jazz – it was not consigned to outer darkness as Guffey claims. There were popular jazz programmes on national TV and radio. Jazz was featured in major films and was the sound of America's nightclubs and Las Vegas. It was then supplanted by the even wilder rock and roll.

Guffey's promotion of the über-crackpot Wilhelm Reich is dangerous and unforgivable. He conveniently neglects to mention that Reich was known to be – shall we say – "insistent" when he wanted sex with any woman in his orbit.

John Jerome
London

Editor's note: While it is true that there were indeed Soviet spies in 1950s USA, it is somewhat grotesque to imply that this justified the witch-hunt of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the ravings of the dipsomaniac senator from Wisconsin. And to dismiss Reich as an "über-crackpot" lacks nuance: his post-1939 research on "orgone energy" po-

THE SURREAL MCCOY

larised opinion, but his early works – particularly Character Analysis *and* The Mass Psychology of Fascism *– were perceptive and hugely influential in the development of psychoanalysis. Many observers view the later Reich (with his orgone boxes and cloud busters) as a fringe scientist with a messiah complex, while his fans regard him as a persecuted genius. As Neil Mortimer put it in "Wilhelm Reich: Guru of the Orgasm" [**FT107:26-30**]: "Whatever physical realities underlie his discoveries, it would be inaccurate to suggest Reich acted out of anything other than the most honourable motives".*

Buried evil

Proponents of the Hollow Earth Theory – if there are any still around – would be interested to read *23 Minutes in Hell* by Bill Weise. The author claims Jesus Christ allowed him to see Hell for 23 minutes to get the word out to Humanity that Hell is very real and Jesus is returning "very, very soon". Weise sensed he was in the lowest part of the Earth – approximately 3,700 miles (6,000km) down – and got there by falling through a tunnel and ascending back to Earth with Jesus through the same tunnel.

Chuck Smith, author of *What The World Is Coming To*, says: "The abyss is literally a shaft. Somewhere upon the surface of the Earth there is a shaft. The entrance to this shaft leads down into the heart of the Earth where Hades exists. Hades is often translated 'Hell' in the Bible. Hell does exist. It is in the center of the Earth". Richard Shaver claimed in Ray Palmer's *Amazing Stories* he had encountered evil, demonic creatures known as 'deros' in the Underworld. Wiese describes demonic creatures that "roughed him up" during his brief visit to the Underworld.

Generations of miners that migrated from the Old Country to America were cautious of certain sounds and entities they often encountered while working far below the surface of the Earth. These sounds included 'knockers' and an ominous organ chord. Also, child-like entities that would appear in the tunnels were omens of disaster.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

THIS IS NOT A DEDICATED RIGHT OF WAY
AND WILL BE CLOSED FOR A PERIOD OF
24 HOURS FROM MIDDAY ON 1ST FEBRUARY
EACH YEAR.
THANK YOU

A door in the woods

This fairy door/house is hidden away in Dumble Woods near Holbrook in Derbyshire and was photographed by my daughter Grace and me. There are always lots of offerings inside and letters from the local children. It has been in the woods for a number of years and no one can remember when it first arrived. It was a whole tree until 2013 storms caused it significant damage and it was cut down to the long stump it is today and furnished with a delightful roof.

Even odder, however, is the sign put up by the landowner stating that the wood will be closed from midday every 1st February for 24hours. Why this is no one seems to know.

Paul & Grace Simmons
Holbrook, Derbyshire

Editor's note: For other fairy doors, see **FT302:70, 305:73, 308:69, 313:71.**

Fairy phone box

Here's another tiny door but this time it's to a phone box fit for a fairy – or more likely a leprechaun since it is on the Emerald Isle – at Swan Park in Buncrana, County Donegal. There are a few little doors throughout the woodland but the phone box is by far the best.

Patricia Arbuckle
Derry, Northern Ireland

letters

Fairy changeling

This firsthand account of meeting a changeling [a fairy being that has been exchanged for a human baby] dates from about 1913. Author and folklorist Otta Swire's family lived at the time in Easter Ross. Her son Dr Jim Swire is a leading campaigner for justice in the 1988 Lockerbie plane crash tragedy (in which his daughter was killed).

"One very nice but very quiet table-maid my mother had from this district, [the fisher village of Avoch on the Black Isle, across the Beauly Firth from Inverness] some fifty years ago, proved to be a changeling. We, of course, knew nothing of this until one day a letter carrying bad news for her arrived; her mother was seriously ill. My mother suggested she should go home at once and was hurrying to look up rail connections when the sobbing girl intervened.

"'Mother's very ill. I can't go home. I mustn't go home. You see, I wouldn't be a good person to have in the house if she died. You see, I am a changeling.'

"She was obviously serious and very unhappy. My mother could only ask with equal seriousness and much sympathy how she knew she was a changeling and what harm it could do her mother if she were one. About the latter she was not very clear.

"A changeling in the house of death would endanger the soul of the dying. Why, she did not know. She supposed the fairies who had sent the changeling might make her steal the soul for them as it left the body. Or perhaps it was a sin to befriend a changeling as her mother had always befriended her, and she would rather die than risk harming her mother.

"As to how she knew she was a changeling, that was simple.

"As a baby, she said, she was like the others (she was one of eleven brothers and sisters), fat and fair. Then, she told us, her hair came in black and she got thin and cried and cried, especially at night.

"One night, when she was nearly a year old, and crying 'fit to raise the roof', her father, 'who's a bit hot tempered like sometimes', picked her up and flung her to the foot of the bed, where she hit her head on the iron bedpost (cold iron) and lay very still.

"All night she lay still and her father and mother thought she was dead and were frightened. But in the morning 'I wasn't dead at all, any more, and I never cried again either, so then they knew I must be a changeling. And when I grew up dark and all of them so fair, then we all knew it. It is lonely being a changeling. I can't ever marry, I'd bring the curse on my husband's home, and I can't ever go to any of my people when they need me. I can't even go to church. It is a lonely thing to be a changeling.'

"Changelings are very rare now in the Highlands. Indeed, Margaret may have been the last. But, like most of these old beliefs, the real thing when you meet it is very different from the fairy tales and has all sorts of practical and reasonable repercussions.

"The 'facts' may be much the same, it is the effect on the ordinary everyday people which is so different. In the changeling 'fairy tales' the tragedy is the mother losing her child and we are all pleased when the wicked changeling is cleverly scored off. In real life the tragedy is the lonely and perhaps frightened changeling itself, for a changeling, having no soul, has no part nor lot with human beings. "

From *The Highlands and Their Legends* by Otta F Swire (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1963, pp113/4).

Ewan McVicar
Linlithgow, Lothian

Killing Slender Man

Thinking about Ian Vincent's article on Slender Man [**FT317:30-37**], the idea that he "cannot be killed" struck me as strange. I'm not given to taking ideas from fantasy too seriously, but if my memory serves me correctly, I recall what I thought at the time to be an unusually perspicacious remark to the effect that what is capable of manifesting in this reality is capable of being killed in this reality. I'm not sure of the exact words or their origin, but I think this idea was expressed in an episode of *Angel* (the *Buffy* spin-off) and possibly by the green "friendly demon" whom I recall being the host of a drinking den for the assorted creatures of the series.

Anyhow, by that logic, presumably Slender Man either cannot be killed because he does not truly "manifest" or the potential solution of defeating Slender Man by rewriting him, expressed later in the article, represents the method for his ultimate demise. We cannot forget him, but we can remember an account of his death. Perhaps, however, that's the fitting (and even obvious) conclusion for a creature that manifests through fiction...

Simon Curzon
By email

Reincarnation

When I was about six or seven I read an article about reincarnation in a popular ladies' weekly. Accepting this doctrine wholesale, I gleefully started promoting it among my friends – 'did you know that after you die, you are born again as another person?' – and was met with general indifference. Since then, the concept of reincarnation has not really loomed large in my mind, but I accept it as one possible scenario, among many others, for what happens after we shuffle off.

Reading about Breatharianism the other day ('Not By Bread Alone' by Ted Harrison, **FT304:44**) my attention was caught by a passage on p. 48: "[Wiley] Brooks claims to have lived largely on air and spiritual power for 30 years now. He also claims a number of interesting past lives [...] amongst others, Adam, Enoch, Elijah, Francis of Assisi and Joseph Smith [...] It is not explained, however, how he could have been, as he claims, simultaneously Jesus and John the Baptist."

I think this is unnecessarily dismissive. If we acknowledge the possibility of reincarnation, there is no reason to assume that this process is restricted by time and space as we know it. When you die, you step outside the stream of time anyway, and I see no contradiction in being able to reincarnate at a point in time *before* your latest incarnation. (In a similar way, some faiths maintain that you can reincarnate on distant planets, or come back as something other than a human.) If one accepts this premise, it doesn't take much imagination to see that the same soul may exist in two or more incarnations simultaneously. It is merely a matter of incarnating twice within a suitably short interval.

In 'Beware Bolivar's Bones' (**FT320:54**) SD Tucker writes: "... it is alleged [Hugo Chavez] left a chair empty for [Simon Bolivar's] ghost during meetings, or even thought he was his reincarnation. Chavez denied all this in public, however..." Tucker goes on: "[Chavez reportedly confessed] that he was also the reincarnation of Ezequiel Zamora, another romantic 19th-century rebel leader..."

Grammatically, I am a little uncertain about that 'also' in the last passage. If Chavez 'denied' being the reincarnation of Bolivar, it sounds strange to say that he 'also confessed' to be the reincarnation of Zamora. But let it pass. My point is that we have the same situation as with Wiley Brooks: there is no inherent contradiction in claiming to have been both Bolivar and Zamora in past lives, even if their lifetimes overlapped some 13 years (Bolivar lived 1783-1830, Zamora 1817-1860).

At this point some readers will reasonably ask how many souls there actually are, anyway, buzzing about like bluebottles on a hot day. Honestly I don't know, but some authorities maintain it's the same soul being reborn again and again. (I can recommend *The Book On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* by Alan Watts.) By the way, this also neatly counters the argument that reincarnation is impossible because there are more people being born than die. As many forteans will know, there is a related idea in physics, the 'One-Electron Universe' as proposed by John Wheeler in 1940. He envisioned all electrons being the same particle, crisscrossing time and space in eternity. I personally find this idea so beautiful that it *must* be true... mustn't it?

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

it happened to me...

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Orange Phantoms

I recently moved into a small cottage in the Welsh village of Llandre, just outside of Aberystwyth. My grandfather had lived in this area, but soon after his death nearly 20 years ago my family moved to Shropshire, so I had little memory of his home. Upon moving to the area I met a lovely lady who had known him. She pointed me in the direction of a small cottage on a nearby hillside and introduced me to the new residents, explaining that I was looking into my grandfather's years in the village. After a brief conversation the couple remembered finding a box of my late grandfather's possessions in the old shed that they had taken down in the garden of the property.

That evening I went through the items in the box and came upon an old diary that belonged to my grandmother. I soon found a number of entries regarding the local churchyard. My grandfather had spent a lot of time walking his dog around the local area and was very fond of the nearby 'poetry trail' and churchyard. A number of entries from 1954 to circa 1970 mentioned my grandfather's obsession with what my grandmother referred to as "bloody orange phantoms". I read on and discovered that my grandfather had regularly mentioned sightings of peculiar orange lights in or around the churchyard at night while walking the dog. My interest was instantly sparked and my new mission became clear, much to the disdain of my better half: to discover the source of my grandfather's orange phantoms.

For two weeks I visited the churchyard nightly armed with a torch and my camera but found no sign of strange orange lights. The following weekend, as my wife was away visiting friends in Dundee, I decided to spend an entire night in the churchyard and wait for the orange lights. I had been sitting in my camping chair sipping from my flask of coffee for around two hours when at about half past midnight I noticed a glow coming from the church. At first I thought it was a faulty streetlamp that had only just turned on, but soon realised that the light was coming from inside the church, through the window. The odd thing about this light was that it was only visible through one of the

HELEN BARRELL

> "I walked back to my mum's house across the fields, and the shadow was still behind me..."

four windows. If I moved to any other angle or looked through any other window the light was not there. From a previous visit to the church I could rule out the idea that the light was in a small room within the church that only had one window. After about five minutes the light vanished and I still couldn't find any explanation for it; no reflections from nearby houses and nobody inside the church as it was locked. I started my short walk home a little while later and much to my surprise saw the light again, this time in the trees above me on the hillside behind the church. It appeared to be moving very slowly from left to right, almost as if it were a lantern or torch in someone's hand. It stayed in this same spot for about half a minute and then slowly faded away. Once it had gone, I went home to bed and decided to return in the daylight. I walked up the hill to the point where I had seen the orange light for the second time to determine whether it could possibly have been a late night walker, but found that the area where I had seen the light was actually a waterfall that leads down into the churchyard. I even went so far as to try and get to the exact spot, about halfway down the waterfall, to see how practical it would be for someone to shine a torch from there, but was unable to.

So what were these orange lights? I cannot say, but at least I can confirm that my grandfather wasn't crazy! I can also confirm that I will be spending a lot more time in the churchyard looking for these lights.

John Stratholme
Llandre, Ceredigion

Graveyard Shade

I had an M R James-style experience back in July, while roaming about an old churchyard photographing the gravestones for my genealogy project.

It was ridiculously hot and sunny, really not a "ghost story day" at all, as I went up to High Ongar church. It was while looking at some 18th century headstones that I realised I wasn't alone. I turned round but didn't see anyone; then I looked again, and saw a black shape, rather like a shadow or mist, where, because of the brightness of the day, it couldn't possibly have been. I carried on transcribing the stones, but always with this shape flitting about at the corner of my eye. It mainly stayed by some old yew trees by the wall of a house that overlooked the churchyard, but as I moved round the stones (I found a very interesting stone from the early 1800s commemorating two youths who were struck by lightning in that very churchyard), I realised it was following me. I concentrated on the task in hand and tried not to dwell on my new 'friend'.

Once I'd finished my transcriptions, I walked back to my mum's house across the fields, and the shadow was still behind me, at some distance. It gave me a chill, at odds with the July heat, but I put it out of my mind. However, as I walked past the ruins of a burnt-out tree in one of the fields, it did feel rather eerie. I didn't mention this to my mum, but the next morning she said: "I think someone followed you home from the churchyard yesterday – when I went to shut up before going to bed last night, I had a feeling there was someone standing by the patio doors, like they wanted to get out."

A week later, I went back to the churchyard with my mum, as she was interested in seeing the "struck by lightning" stone. I didn't notice the shadow person again, but at one point I had a peculiar sensation of dread. I turned sharply to move away, and hit my head on one of the gravestones and concussed myself. I think I'll keep away from churchyards for a while.

Helen Barrell
Birmingham

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

97. Lincoln Cathedral

TED HARRISON explores the historical oddities of Lincoln Cathedral and the contemporary conspiracy theories surrounding this great mediæval church.

In 1995, shortly after being acquitted by a Church court of sexual misconduct, the dean of the famous gothic Cathedral of Lincoln, made a strange statement to the press. He said that his cathedral should be closed for an extended period so that it could be exorcised.

Lincoln Cathedral had been an unhappy place for a long time. Indeed, many clergy whispered that currents of conflict, hate and evil had been present in the Cathedral for centuries. Dean Brandon Jackson himself declared that he believed a battle of good and evil centred on the ancient building. When the deans and provosts of England's cathedrals met at their annual conference that year there was talk of the Cathedral being filled with "swirling evil". One senior cleric is reported as confiding to his peers that the Cathedral was one of the most evil places he had been in. Another dean reportedly suggested that the root of the problem was the position of the cathedral on a junction of leys.

Dean Jackson's bizarre announcement came towards the end of a long-running and very public feud between himself and the canon treasurer, Rex Davis. It became so prolonged and acrimonious that the two men were called to Lambeth Palace to be interviewed by the then Archbishop of Canterbury. When he told each in turn to resign their posts they both initially refused. "Wherever I have gone in the world people have spoken about the scandal at Lincoln," Archbishop Carey complained. "We cannot allow this to carry on being a cancer in the body of Christ."

The Cathedral was never closed for deep spiritual cleaning and rationalists insisted that there was nothing intrinsically evil about the building at all. It was just the unfortunate backdrop to a clash of two strong personalities, aided and abetted by a mediæval structure of governance that enables ill feeling to fester in many a cathedral close.

Yet Lincoln Cathedral, despite its astonishing and uplifting architecture, is not a site spoken of as one of notable holiness. Indeed, it has a persistent reputation as a troubled place. Its most famous feature is not a great work of art, stained glass window or exquisite carving designed to lift the eyes of the viewer to heaven, but a grotesque image said to represent an envoy of the Devil.

LEFT: Dean Jackson believed Lincoln Cathedral to be the centre of an ancient battle between good and evil.

BELOW: The great West Front of the cathedral.

THE LITTLE IMP

The Cathedral, although dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is celebrated worldwide for the Lincoln Imp. It is a statuette of a malevolent looking demon set high on the south side of the most north-easterly pillar of the area of the Cathedral known as the Angel Choir. The imp is about 18in (46cm) high, weighs over 20lb (9kg) and is the most famous of several grotesques carved in the stones of what should be a sacred building. Such is the imp's fascination for visitors that he has been adopted as the symbol of the city. The local football team is named after him. Models and postcards of the imp can be bought at souvenir shops around the city and are very popular with tourists. The Cathedral shop sells imp key rings, cuff links and even a pattern to knit your own imp. He is a great marketing aid, much used to sell the Cathedral to tourists.

"In mediæval iconography he represents the evil side of all of us," explains the Cathedral website. A

Victorian guidebook by AF Kendrick describes the imp in colourful detail. "The broad grin, the two short horns behind the ears, the hairy body and cloven hoofs all combine to form a characteristic record of the exuberant fancy of our mediæval artists." [1]

What is not explained is why a mediæval mason decided to decorate a house of God with an image of evil. Did he know, as the structure was being built, that it was a place destined to host dark forces?

There are several folk legends that explain the imp's presence. One oft-told story has it that Satan sent the imp to the Cathedral to cause trouble. He was busy destroying the angel choir when an angel appeared to admonish him. The imp jumped up onto a pillar and started throwing rocks at the angel. The angel retaliated by turning the imp into stone.

Another version of the story, dating back to the 14th century, was broadcast by BBC Radio Lincolnshire. It is similar but provides more detail and relates how Satan sent two imps down to Earth to do evil work. First, they went to Chesterfield and sat on the church spire, twisting it in the process – which is why Chesterfield still has a crooked spire. The two imps then headed to Lincoln. When they arrived at the Cathedral the Devil instructed them to cause as much mayhem as possible. "The imps started by smashing up tables and chairs and tripping up the Bishop, and then they started destroying the angel choir. An angel appeared and told them to stop. One of the imps was brave and started throwing rocks at the angel but the other imp cowered under the broken tables and chairs. When the angel turned the first imp to stone it gave the second imp a chance to escape." He got away with the help of a witch, riding on her broomstick. She subsequently took a liking to the imp and turned him into a black cat.

In yet another version of the story it is said that the imp was sent by the Devil specifically to plague the clergy. He was blown in through the west doors by a great wind that snuffed out the candles and scattered the hymn sheets. The imp attacked the choristers and flew into the angel choir where he threatened to pluck out the angels' feathers. Again, in this story, he gets his comeuppance when he is turned to stone.

Whichever way the story is embroidered, its central core remains consistent. A demonic force somehow got into Lincoln's house of God and has remained there to this day. Trapped in stone, this evil influence, whatever it might be, has no means of escape and continues to exert a malevolent influence. Or so it is said…

LUCIFER'S EYE

Several other aspects of the cathedral symbolise the fight between good and evil. The magnificent mediæval rose windows, which face each other across the north-south transept, have been known for centuries as the 'Dean's Eye' and the 'Bishop's Eye'.

Kendrick's Victorian guidebook says that the simplest explanation for the two names is that one window faces the Deanery and the other faces the Bishop's Palace. Yet he adds that: "a far more poetic interpretation than this has been devised. The north is the region of Lucifer and in that direction the Dean's Eye must look to guard against his approach. Meanwhile the Bishop's Eye is turned towards the sunny south, the region of the Holy Spirit, whose sweet influence alone can overcome the wiles of the wicked one."

One lesser-used name for the north-facing window is 'Lucifer's Eye'. The word Lucifer means 'morning star' and it is curious to note that close by the Cathedral is an old city pub, with a known history of almost 250 years, called 'The Morning Star'.

Folklorist Frank E Earp, author of 'The A-Z of Curious Nottinghamshire', has researched a story that connects the Cathedral with the Devil in an unexpected way. There was once a stone in the village of Kinoulton, in the southeast of the county, said to have been hurled there by Old Nick himself. It's not an uncommon tale often found to explain glacial erratics in the landscape and rooted probably in the

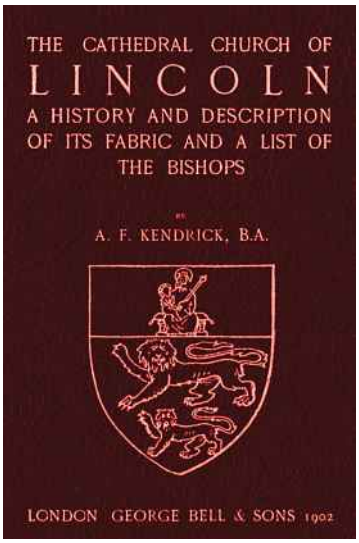
THE LINCOLN IMP

The original of this quaint figure is to be found in the Angel Choir in Lincoln Cathedral, where it commemorates the legend of how the devil endeavoured to frustrate the building of the Cathedral. He is represented as he is said to have sat jeering at the workmen. Lincoln College, Oxford, having been founded by Robert Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln, and still having the Bishop of that diocese for their visitor, have adopted this figure as a kind of symbol or emblem. It is found high up on the wall on the front quadrangle, and a wooden replica, formerly carried by the coxswain during 'Eights', still hangs in the College barge.

ABOVE: The Lincoln Imp.

LEFT: The Imp as seen on an old postcard. There have even been attempts to ban him over the years: see **FT57:20**.

RIGHT: Kendrick's Victorian guide to the cathedral.


THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF
LINCOLN
A HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF ITS FABRIC AND A LIST OF THE BISHOPS
BY
A. F. KENDRICK, B.A.
LONDON GEORGE BELL & SONS 1902

The imp was sent by the Devil to plague the clergy

GETTY IMAGES

ancient conflict between Christianity and Paganism. What is unusual in the case of the Kinoulton tale is that the Devil is said to have hurled the stone from Lincoln Cathedral, some 30 miles (48km) away. In local folklore, at least, there appears to have been a belief that the Devil was present there. One ancient story has it that he lurks inside the cathedral, fearing that he would be blown away if he ever ventured outside – a reference to the Cathedral's exposed and windy position on a hill above the city looking out over miles of flat Lincolnshire countryside all around.

An article in the *Lindsey and Lincolnshire Star* of May 1898 gives weight to the notion that Lincoln Cathedral's diabolic side was well rooted in regional legend. An article on Lincoln Minster and the Devil says that the connection between "the Prince of Evil and Lincoln has long been proverbial".

Arguably Walter Scott knew about Lincoln's reputation when, in the first chapter of his 1821 novel *Kenilworth*, he employed the expression "the Devil looking over Lincoln". Whatever the origins of that saying there is no doubt Lincoln's evil legend is an old one and not simply the product of a quarrel between two 20th century clerics.

THE LINCOLN CATHEDRAL CODE

Interest in the Cathedral's dark side increased in 2005 when it was announced that some of the film of Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* would be shot at Lincoln, with the Cathedral doubling for Westminster Abbey. It was in that same year that Ellis C Taylor, a self-styled interdimensional traveller, healer and numerologist, took up his interest in the building's occult reputation.

The film of *The Da Vinci Code* was shot at Lincoln Cathedral

ABOVE: Pastor Bill Cairns preaches against the filming of the movie version of Dan Brown's popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* at Lincoln Cathedral in 2005.

"My own research led me to the startling and unexpected discovery of the 'Lincoln Cathedral Code' involving the mystery of Rennes-le-Château, Mary Magdalene and the Knights Templar," he later wrote.[2] The imp, he asserts, is a clue left by masons indicating a Templar treasure of great significance.

Taylor appears to have found evidence, at least to his own satisfaction, linking Lincoln Cathedral with an especially well-trodden fortean path favoured by many a contemporary maverick thinker.

Yet he takes the story to even darker depths and implicates Lincoln Cathedral in a truly weird claim. Lincoln Cathedral hides 'The Ark of Lucifer'.

The diabolic equivalent of the Ark of the Covenant, it is said to possess amazing powers to extend the human life span – nothing less than the secret of immortality. In faux-scientific terms it allegedly "works on a vibratory frequency affecting changes at the molecular level of living tissue".

According to Taylor, at some time during the 1920s there were 144 initiates who knew of its existence. They had in their possession 12 keys that would enable them to open a secret vault in the Cathedral, where presumably the ark is still housed. As far as is known they never got round to using the keys; but when the day comes and the Ark's hiding place is eventually opened, it will be a precise and dramatic procedure: "If we are to believe it, there is a Master Key held somewhere within the Cathedral, described as a corkscrew with the representation of the Cathedral as a handle". The 12 keys, if used correctly, enable the master key to open the door to the vault.

There is, says Ellis Taylor, "no end of occultists seeking the key to open the Ark and unleash its consequences." But it would not be without considerable risk, he warns. The Ark was originally kept at St Mary's church in Lincoln, and on the occasion a Bishop Alexander tried to retrieve it, it is said to have caused the devastating fire that ravaged the building in 1141. On another occasion in 1185 an attempt to activate the Ark caused an earthquake.

When a senior churchman observed at the meeting of deans and provosts 20 years ago that Lincoln cathedral had significance in the study of leys he was echoing a view written about in some detail by geomancer Richard Leviton. It is the location rather than the building that is of mystical significance. In his book *Walking in Albion*, and in various articles, he visualises the British landscape as part of a giant cosmic being whose second chakra – or energy field – is at Lincoln Cathedral.

He described his field research in an article published on the World Mysteries website. His first interest lay in the small village of Tetford, which he referred to is one of "Gaia's primary receptive points for the new Aquarian energy". He wrote:

"Albion, like humans, has a progression of energy-consciousness centres in his landscape body, what we usually call chakras. Tetford is the root chakra.

"We spent the remainder of the week meditating each day in nearby Lincoln Cathedral, one of England's great Gothic churches, set prominently on a hill overlooking the old city. Each day we drove the 20 miles (32km) from Tetford to Lincoln knowing we were moving through a tunnel of light connecting two great centres of awareness in this ancient landscape giant."[3]

Richard Leviton's book *The Emerald Modem* was one source that Ellis C Taylor drew on in his research into Lincoln's evil reputation. At the

root of the Cathedral's problems, it is suggested, is the celestial being "imprisoned" under the building, the structure of which is in itself "a perpetual black magic ritual intended to keep the being imprisoned, ultimately the Cathedral opposing the positive energy that is there." [4] What that celestial being might be remains open to speculation.

HOLY BLOOD

Lincoln Cathedral has been written into both New Age 'mystery science' and the imaginative narratives that link the shadowy Priory of Sion, the Holy Grail, the Templars, Rosslyn Chapel et al. Indeed aficionados of this genre of pseudo-history give Lincoln an increasingly central role.

The Cathedral has been scoured for clues and signs of significance. Supposedly, the Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson was a member of the secretive Priory of Sion, which is why his statue stands close by the cathedral; the fact that he was a local lad has seemingly been overlooked. Author Callum Jensen (aka Dan Green) calls Tennyson the 'grail poet', on the strength, presumably, of his interest in the Arthurian legend, and says of the statue raised to him that it is loaded with Priory clues – in particular those concerning a mysterious symbol of a dog. The signs, he says, are "waiting to be noticed and decoded". [5] The more mundane explanation for the presence of a large dog on Tennyson's plinth is that the sculptor, Tennyson's friend GF Watts, opted to depict Tennyson in familiar informal pose with his faithful mastiff Sirius. Or is that one of the clues, Sirius being the Dog Star, the brightest star in the heavens, an astrological pointer?

Jensen/Green worries away at the dog motif and builds up its mystic significance. The word is an anagram of God, he helpfully points out. He tells of a discovery in 2005 of a scene of the Last Supper high up in the stained glass of the Great East Window of Lincoln Cathedral. On close inspection, just before cleaning, it was noted that on Christ's platter there was not, as would be expected, a piece of bread, but a dog!

Furthermore, he claims, in a 15th century German woodcut of Jesus on his journey to Calvary, also in the cathedral, there is another dog staring at the suffering Christ.

Should someone discover the way of deciphering all the clues – dogs, imps and all – Green suggests that what will be revealed is one of the Templars' greatest secrets: the burial place of Mary Magdalene. And it is somewhere in Lincoln Cathedral or its vicinity.

The Cathedral, it is said, is not dedicated to the Virgin Mary as is officially claimed by the modern dean and chapter. They have the wrong Mary. It is built on the site of a far older Christian building dedicated to Mary Magdalene, the saint said in an 'alternative' Christian narrative to have been the wife of Jesus and the mother of his child.

Jensen/Green concludes his speculative journey into the Lincoln Code with a theory that the story of the Lucifer Ark "may well be a memory tool to highlight the numbers 12 and 144 and could have a value concerning sacred geometry within the Cathedral, 'ark' may actually refer to 'arc', part of the circumference of a circle or other curve. Richard Leviton's thoughts on there being a figure of some importance held captive may well be an unconscious tapping in and offshoot of my own work in which I have announced the stashed and most sought after Templar treasure of Rennes-le-Château residing opposite the SE corner of the Cathedral at the St Margaret's burial grounds, involving the revered figure of Mary Magdalene." [6]

Lincoln Cathedral is a masterpiece of mediæval masonic skill. Unlike many old buildings that are a hotchpotch of styles, it is complete in itself. Like many cathedrals of its period it incorporates elements of sacred geometry, numbers and ratios built into its proportions, which to the original builders were of numerological and religious importance. Most of the meaning behind the number schemes they employed has been lost, but that snippets of meaning have survived in story and superstition is not improbable.

Cathedrals as communities have long been recognised, potentially at least, as hotbeds of intrigue. Trollope's Barchester captured the essence of precinct politics and little has changed since his day. Except perhaps that the Church of England is marginally less worldly than it was in Victorian times and increasing numbers of members and clergy subscribe to the charismatic revival and have an invigorated fascination and literal belief in the Devil and the forces of darkness.

Add to the mix Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and a contemporary fascination with secret societies and conspiracy theories, and the fact that one of England's major cathedrals has acquired for itself a colourful, if rather sinister, reputation is not altogether surprising.

But why Lincoln? Perhaps that's down to the mischievous imp. He is now such an effective brand image for the cathedral that he rather dominates the place in the public imagination; so much so that Lincoln Cathedral today is both a house of God and home to a little devil. FT

NOTES

1 A F Kendrick, *Lincoln: The Cathedral and See*, 1898.

2 www.ellisctaylor.com/cjbattleground.html

3 "Walking in Albion: Chronicles of Plan-Net Geomancy Part I: Child of the Ancient Giant", www.world-mysteries.com/mpl_rl2.htm

4 www.ellisctaylor.com/cjbattleground.html

5 www.unexplained-mysteries.com

6 www.ellisctaylor.com/cjbattleground.html

BELOW: Is Jesus tucking into a dog at the Last Supper? A scene from Lincoln's 13th century East Window.

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, regular FT contributor and author of a number of books. His latest, *Apocalypse When?*, is out now from Darton, Longman and Todd.

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News.*

35. THE HAUNTED MURDER HOUSE NEAR CHARD

In 1879, one of the veteran inhabitants of the tiny village of Knowle St Giles, situated between Chard and Ilminster in Somerset, was the 83-year-old farm labourer Samuel Churchill. In spite of his age, he was still working on various farms, cutting hedges and tending pigs and poultry. Churchill had been married once before, but his wife had died 25 years earlier; they had a daughter named June who had married the labourer George English. After Churchill's first wife had died, he had employed a much younger woman named Katherine Walden as house-keeper, and they had an illegitimate son, also named named Samuel, before Katherine finally managed to persuade the stubborn old man to make an honest woman of her in 1871. They lived together in a small cottage, along with their now adult son Samuel. Katherine's mother, a cantankerous old woman who was nearly deaf and blind, also lived with them.

Samuel and Katherine Churchill never got on particularly well, however. They quarrelled at regular intervals, and these altercations sometimes ended in blows. Old Samuel was still hale and hearty, but Katherine was a strong, forceful woman with a furious temper. Since she worked as a laundrywoman and in the fields, she was sturdy and muscular. It was well known in the neighbourhood that Samuel and his wife fought frequently and angrily. Samuel's daughter June English disliked her overbearing stepmother, and often said that one day this wicked woman would bully her dotard husband into making a will leaving all his money to the bastard son Samuel. For her part, Katherine was equally fearful that June would persuade old Samuel to cut her illegitimate son out of

ABOVE: The murder near Chard, from the *IPN*, 29 March 1879. **TOP**: Fore Street, Chard, from an old postcard. The inquest on Samuel Churchill was held at the George Hotel (which still stands), a few houses down the left side of the street.

STRATED NEWS
EKLY RECORD

the will. In 1877, Katherine and young Samuel had set upon the old man when he was returning from Ilminster Fair: they had beaten him up and torn the shirt off his back. Old Samuel had sought refuge with the Englishes, complaining of the harsh treatment to which he had been subjected, but the wily Katherine later persuaded him to return home.

On 4 March 1879, George English was called to Samuel Churchill's cottage after word had spread that there had been an accident. He found old Samuel dead in the fireplace, his body much burnt and charred. Sharing his wife's low opinion of Katherine, George English immediately suspected that she had murdered the old man. He saw her lurking in the bedroom, and remarked that this was a bad business, and the sinister woman agreed. She said that old Samuel had been suffering from fainting-fits, and that he must have fallen into the fire when she was out. When she came back home, she had tried to pour water on him, but he was already dead. A police constable and a doctor came to the cottage, and although old Samuel's body was very badly burnt, they found signs of blows to the face, head and hands. A blood-stained bill-hook matching these injuries was found hidden on the premises. When Katherine was taken away by the police, she turned to her son Samuel and said: "See to the will, and mind they don't cheat you out of the money!"

ABOVE: The ghosts frighten the inhabitants of the murder cottage, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 20 December 1879.

When Katherine Churchill was on trial for murder at the Taunton Assizes, before Baron Huddleston, the doctor and the two Englishes gave damning evidence against her. George English added that a few weeks before the murder, he had heard old Samuel threaten to cut his illegitimate son out of the will. As for young Samuel himself, he was fortunate to possess a cast iron alibi: at the time of the murder, he had been at work at a farm nearby, with a number of other labouring men. A young servant girl, Eliza Barrow, had an important story to tell. She had been walking past Samuel Churchill's cottage when she heard a cry of 'Murder!' and saw a woman attack an old man. She ran to her master's house, suggesting that perhaps he ought to go to the Churchill cottage to make sure that all was well, but he just laughed, saying that the two Churchills were notorious for their fighting and quarrelling. In the end, Katherine Churchill was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. The usual squeamishness with regard to hanging women did not apply to such a hardened wretch, who had beaten her elderly husband to death for reasons of greed and gain, and she was executed within the precincts of Taunton Gaol on 26 May.

In December 1879, the following short but sinister account was published in the *IPN*, quoted from a Plymouth newspaper:

In March last an old man named Churchill was murdered in a cottage near Chard. For some time after the execution the building remained uninhabited, but at length it was let to a labourer and his family, but the incomers soon found they could obtain no rest. They state that the murderess, 'Kitty', has been frequently seen to glide about the premises in ghostly attire, and that old Churchill has been distinctly observed to look in at the window, with hideous countenance. This added to the appearance of blood on the floor of the room in which the tragedy was enacted, supernatural movements amongst the furniture and other articles, and unearthly noises in the immediate vicinity of the cottage, so unsettled the occupants that they at last abandoned the dwelling, which is now regarded as 'haunted'.

It is a pity that nothing is known about the later fate of this extraordinary haunted murder cottage near Chard: does it still exist today, and are these formidable ghosts, worthy of the Amityville House, still active on the premises?

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX Carl Jung PART 2

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON

AS JUNG GREW INTO MANHOOD, HE DISCOVERED THAT HE HAD **TELEPATHIC** POWERS! IN ONE EMBARRASSING INCIDENT, HE **MADE UP** A DISGRACEFUL STORY TO ENTERTAIN ANOTHER GUEST AT A WEDDING...

...AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID THEN?

JUNG HAD BEEN TELLING THE STORY OF THE MAN'S OWN SECRET NAUGHTINESS!

?

HE ALSO BECAME A MAGNET FOR WEIRD MANIFESTATIONS! FOR INSTANCE...

THAT TABLE IS MASSIVE, SOLID...

...AND SEVENTY YEARS OLD!

BANG!

TWO WEEKS LATER, THERE WAS **ANOTHER** EXPLOSION – A STEEL KNIFE IN THE KITCHEN BURST INTO **PIECES!!**

HIS DREAMS BEGAN TO TAKE A TELEPATHIC FORM TOO! ONE NIGHT HE WOKE WITH A SHARP PAIN AT THE BACK OF HIS HEAD...

OW!

THE NEXT DAY HE DISCOVERED THAT ONE OF HIS PATIENTS HAD **SHOT** HIMSELF AT THE SAME HOUR!

I'VE GOT A HEADACHE! AND IT'S **YOUR** FAULT!

THESE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENED EVEN WHEN HE WAS WITH SCEPTICS LIKE **FREUD!** ONE DAY HE WAS IN FREUD'S STUDY IN VIENNA WHEN...

BANG!

AHA! AN EXTERIORISATION PHENOMENON!

BOSH!

THINK SO? JUST WAIT...

BANG!

BOOK OF BIG BANGS

THE TENSION BETWEEN FREUD AND JUNG OVER HIS **OCCULT** LEANINGS GREW SO INTENSE THAT FREUD SOMETIMES **FAINTED** FROM TENSION WHEN THEY ARGUED...

is!

is!!

is is is is is!!!

isn't!

isn't!

isn't isn't isn't

TWANG

FOR THE REST OF HIS MATURE LIFE **JUNG** WAS VISITED BY **STRANGE, WONDERFUL** AND **FRIGHTENING** VISIONS...

ONE OF THE MOST TERRIFYING WAS A VAST RIVER OF BLOOD THAT POURED ALL ACROSS **EUROPE**...

UK

BELGIUM

HOLLAND

GERMANY

RUSSIA

POLAND

FRANCE

AUSTRIA

SPAIN

TURKEY

AFRICA

ITALY

PALESTINE

A FEW WEEKS LATER THE GREAT WAR BEGAN...

NEXT: DWARVES, REVELATIONS, AND YET MORE BLOOD!

COMING NEXT MONTH

OUTBACK OUTBREAK

THE POLTERGEIST THAT TOOK OVER AN AUSTRALIAN FARM

THE MIND ELECTRIC

ELECTROMAGNETIC EXPLANATIONS FOR NDEs

+

SPOOKS OF THE SOUTH, ARTHUR C CLARKE, HAIRLESS HYAENAS AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 323

ON SALE 8 JAN 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Heval Yildirim, 13, was killed when a sacrificial goat jumped (or fell) off a roof in Diyarbakir, south-eastern Turkey, and landed on his head. The schoolboy was playing with friends when the animal – which also died – plummeted six floors from the top of a block of flats. Hevel's father Mehmet had brought the goat into town to sacrifice on the feast day of Eid al-Adha – which honours the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son when commanded by God (who then intervenes by giving him a lamb to kill instead). Mehmet could not find anywhere suitable to keep the goat, so stowed it on the roof above the family's flat on the top floor. "I am devastated but what more can I say?" he said. "In fact there is nothing at all to say." The police said it was the first such case they had heard of. The Gang of Fort, however, recalls a variation on the theme: in 1997 a goat destined for Eid al-Adha sacrifice fatally butted its prospective killer off a four-storey building in Cairo [**FT101:19**]. *Metro, 8 Oct 2014.*

Not long afterwards in India, another boy's death was caused by a goat. Low-caste teenager Sai Ram, 15, was burnt to death in the Rohtas district of Bihar on 15 October for allowing his goat to stray into paddy fields belonging to a high-caste farmer. *D.Telegraph*, 17 Oct 2014.

Winemaker Nerea Pérez, 25, from Salas de los Barrios, northern Spain, drowned late September in an enormous vat of red wine. She was monitoring the fermentation process when she was overwhelmed by fumes and toppled over into the vat, where her uncle Raul Perez, a well-known wine maker, discovered her floating face down. Emergency services were called, but she could not be resuscitated. *dailymail.co.uk, 1 Oct; InfoBierzo.com, 4 Oct 2014.*

A property developer killed himself because he couldn't live with the humiliation of spending £5,500 on a fake Rolex on eBay. Bill Mosley, 49, a father of three, was found hanging in his garden shed in Steeton, West Yorkshire, on 29 March after "being taken for a mug" on the Internet auction site. An inquest in Bradford was told he had no money worries but was on anti-depressants. *Sun, D.Telegraph, 22 Aug 2014.*

In mid-September, a giant man-eating catfish that had been terrorising villagers was finally caught in the Mekong river by local Khmu tribe fishermen from the Laotian village of Luang Pang near the convergence of the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand. In its stomach were found human bone fragments of what experts estimated to be between 12 and 22 people, mostly children. "We estimate the beast weighted around 600lb or next to 300kg since its head, tail and fins had been chopped off by local villagers before biologists were aware of the catch and could examine the body," said biologist Kalaina Maona from the National University of Laos's Natural Science Department.

Dozens of children and a handful of elderly people have been reported missing in the past 20 years from the local area, leading some local authorities to claim the beast was behind the wave of disappearances. Rumours of a giant river monster capturing villagers were common amongst elder villagers but thought by local police to be folklore, until recently. "Legends of river creatures preying on local tribesmen have been part of Khmu culture for centuries" said anthropologist Mary Stewart Hedger from McGill University in Montreal. *worldnewsdailyreport.com, 17 Sept 2014.*

Tanzanian police have charged 23 people with murder after seven villagers were burned alive on suspicion of witchcraft on 6 October. Five of those killed in Murufiti, a village in the western Kigoma region, were aged over 60, the other two were over 40. Among those arrested was the local traditional healer, or witch doctor. Witnesses say some of the victims were attacked with machetes or burnt almost beyond recognition. The son of one of the victims, Josephat John, said: "When I returned home in the evening, I found the body of my mother lying 10 metres away from our house, while the body of my father was burnt inside the house."

Belief in witchcraft is prevalent in many parts of Tanzania. Between 2005 and 2011, around 3,000 people were killed after being accused of being witches. Several were old women, but young children and albinos were also targeted, the latter because their body parts are thought to bring prosperity. *BBC News, 10 Oct; D.Telegraph, 11 Oct 2014.*

A bolt of lightning killed 11 members of a Colombian indigenous group and injured 19 others during a "spiritual harmonisation ritual" in an isolated mountain region on the night of Sunday, 5 October. The lightning struck the *uguma* (ceremonial hut) where spiritual leaders of the Wiwa community of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta were gathered together. The adobe building with thatched roof burnt to the ground. The dead were to be left unburied where they died, according to tribal tradition, and the community of about 60 families will abandon the village. "When the indigenous die as a result of tragic acts of nature, the community abandons the place to avoid other dangerous natural phenomena," said Jose Gegio Rodriguez, a Wiwa advisor to the National Indigenous Organisation (ONIC). The injured, many with first- and second-degree burns, were airlifted by army helicopter for treatment in the Caribbean city of Santa Marta. ONIC said it was concerned about the future of the Wiwa because most of those who died were men, which left their families vulnerable. *Guardian, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 8 Oct; MX News (Sydney), 13 Oct 2014.*

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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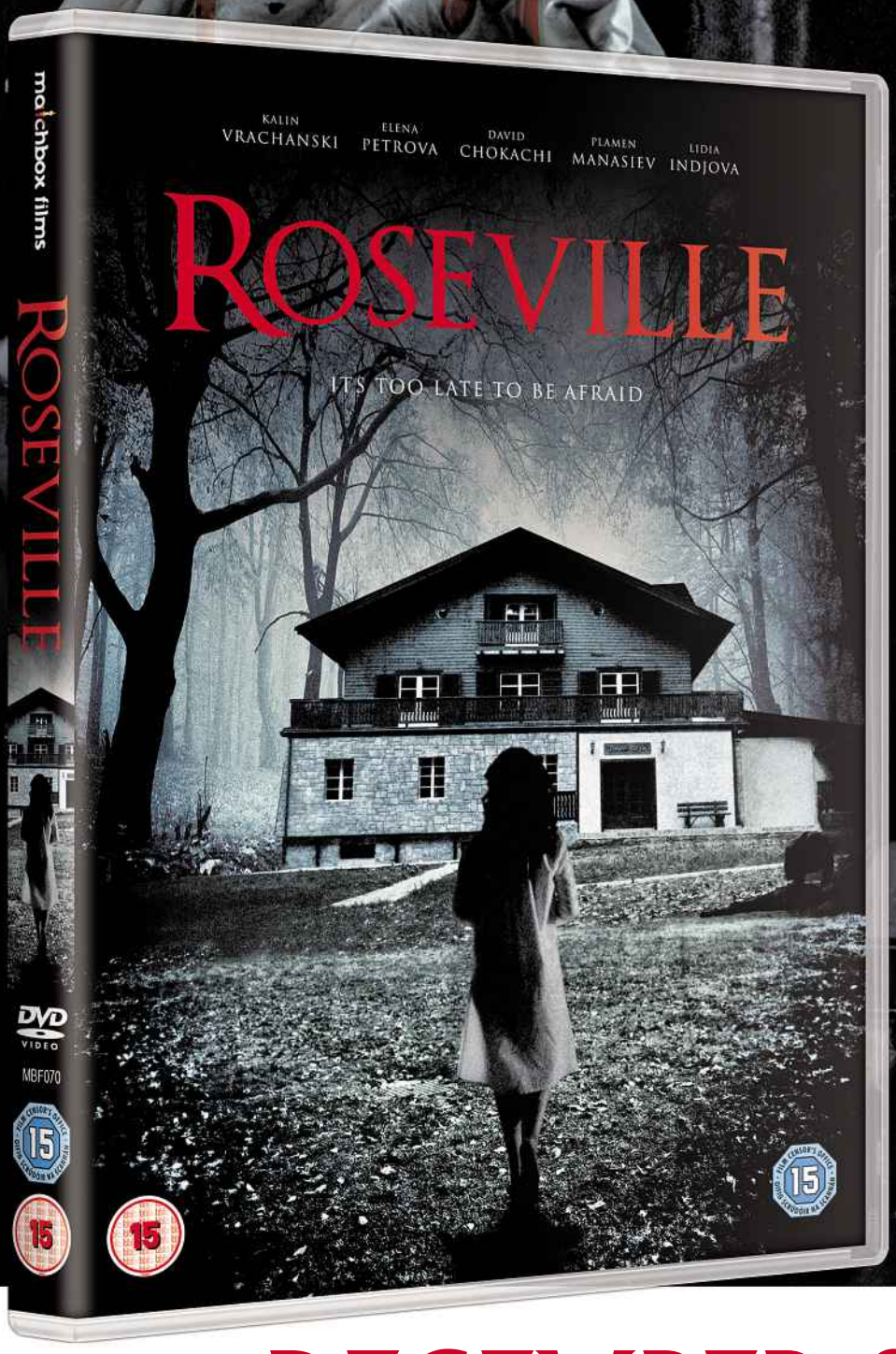

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